NEWSTATESMAN
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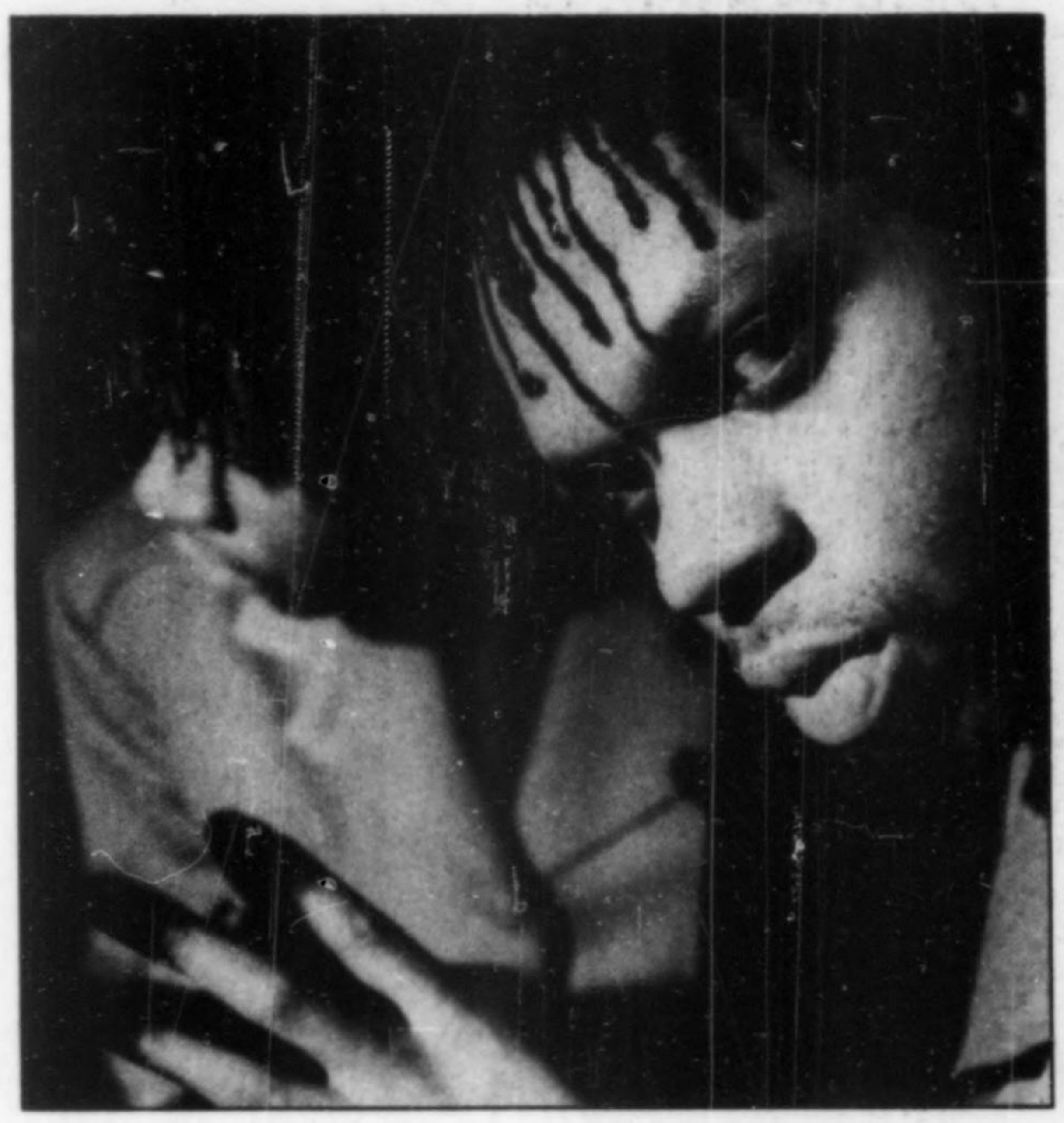
Black economy



A thriving underground enterprise culture has grown up around music—bootlegged vinyl, pirate radio, warehouse parties. It's a black economy powered by black aesthetics, but its consumers are often white. Sample it inside.

Gibraltar: Duncan Campbell exclusively reveals why the SAS shot to kill

Occupied: on patrol with the Israeli army on the West Bank

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Protecting those blessed plots

"The tatty old plot where Dad spent his Sundays"

As the allotment makes a comeback, Colin Ward analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the movement.

For the first time since the second world war the allotment movement is growing. Predictions that it would die when the last cloth-capped pensioner locked up his shed have been proved wrong. The environmental consciousness of the 1970s has bred a new kind of allotment owner. But despite this growth the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners has been unable effectively to champion the rights of the renewed movement.

At the "National" 's annual meeting last week, 120 delegates were told of the sixth consecutive year of trading losses and the desperate need for an increase in affiliation fees from the 25p fixed in 1980 to 35p. Reluctantly, and after much debate, the increase was agreed.

For an organisation that celebrates its diamond jubilee in 1990 and represents such growing numbers of people (Friends of the Earth report that the waiting list for allotments has gone up 1,600 per cent in England and Wales in the last ten years) the society makes pathetically small demands on its members and gets sadly grudging support.

Allotment gardening is an ancient occupation. Its name comes from the land allotted to the poor at the time of the enclosures. It epitomises the 19th century struggle to get enshrined into law the last vestige of the natural right of every citizen to a plot of land to feed the family. It is a demand that was echoed in the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908 — which imposes a duty on local councils to provide plots.

The two world wars transformed allotment holding from a necessity for the poor to a contribution to national self-sufficiency. During the second world war numbers rose from about 815,000 in England and Wales in 1939 to perhaps 1,700,000 in 1946, when the National had nearly 4,000 affiliated local societies. Today it has 1,378 representing 100,341 members.

The trouble is that this is less than a quarter of all allotment holders. The Department of the Environment abandoned collecting statistics ten years ago, but figures gathered by David Crouch from local authorities suggest that there are half a million.

The National's problem is that experience tells that every increase in the capitation fee brings a fall-off in member societies, and some of the activists believe that it is more important for the society to be representative than to be solvent — and effective. In 1965 the late Professor Harry Thorpe was invited to chair a departmental committee of inquiry into allotments. He reported four years later in a 450-page blue book — all his recommendations were ignored by subsequent governments.

Thorpe saw the post-war decline in allotment-holding, coupled with the new affluence and instant food, as signs that the movement was on the wane. He wanted to consolidate the morass of allotment law into one act and argued for recognition that allotment gardening was part of the "leisure" facilities to be provided by local authorities — especially as these same authorities did not stint on investment in other forms of leisure. Above all, he wanted a commitment to changing the allotment's image from the tatty old plot where Dad spent his Sundays to the leisure garden on the continental model, which is a well-serviced facility for the whole family.

The right to grow some of your own food is fundamentally different from other recreation

Thorpe was elected President of the National and its name was changed from allotment to leisure gardeners (a movement known as the Yorkshire backlash got the word allotment reinstated). Some councils, notably Birmingham, did not wait for legislation, but began the process of upgrading their sites into leisure gardens. The octogenarian Labour peer, Lord Wallace of Coslany, twice succeeded in manipulating a Recreational Gardening Bill through all stages in the House of Lords only to see it instantly "objected" in the Commons.

Thorpe complained that "one of the main problems is that gardeners are peaceful and complacent, only becoming militant on greenfly, blackfly, slugs, cats and wood-pigeons. Any action is left to old Tom, Dick, Harry or somebody else". But no sooner had Thorpe's report appeared than the interest in energy-saving, ecology and organic fresh food, belied his assumption that "allotment gardening holds little attraction for the young".

The old timers watched sceptically, knowing that many of the recruits did not realise the sheer continual hard work involved in gardening. But many of the new influx stayed the pace, though there are complaints that they fail to do their share of the organisational chores. Several reasons are given. One is diffidence, for we are told of a wish by incomers not to be part of a trendy middle class take-over of this last remnant of traditional working class culture. Another, put to us by one old gardener, was that "These chaps are pushing paper around all week. They don't want to do it at the weekend too." The usual reason for both old and new is shortage of time.

In the 1970s councils developed huge waiting lists for allotments. Today areas as diverse as Wigton in Cumbria and the London borough of Hackney all have few or no vacancies. Yet allotments, even on statutory, protected sites are continually under threat. Last year the National was approached by over 60 societies objecting to proposed changes of land use. Councils are obliged to keep an allotment revenue account, but sometimes they load this with administrative costs which are fictitious — like charges for electricity and water even on sites where these services are not laid on.

The attenuated National urges country groups to approach the regional offices of the Sports Council to seek recognition of allotment and leisure gardening as a recreation. There are, of course, objections to the idea that this last survival of ancient communal rights is a mere hobby. Irene Evans protests that "the right to grow some of your own food is fundamentally different from any right you might have to score a goal or sink a putt."

Since gardening is the most widespread active recreation of the British, the problems of the allotment holder deserve more public support. But equally, the National deserves support from allotment gardeners. Compare its pathetic state with the success of another category of land users, the National Farmers' Union. A delegate noted, "the difference is that the farmers know perfectly well that it makes sense to subscribe enough to maintain a full-time staff to negotiate continually with government and parliament. *We* aren't willing to subscribe enough to run our own internal affairs efficiently."

Alas, this was evident last week. If the membership would pay as much as members of any other national interest group would, the National could employ a properly funded national organiser to tour the non-member societies, and to lobby local authorities and MPs to reintroduce a bill straightening out the tangle of allotment law. Tom, Dick and Pauline can't do it alone.

David Crouch and Colin Ward are the authors of "The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture" to be published next month by Faber and Faber.

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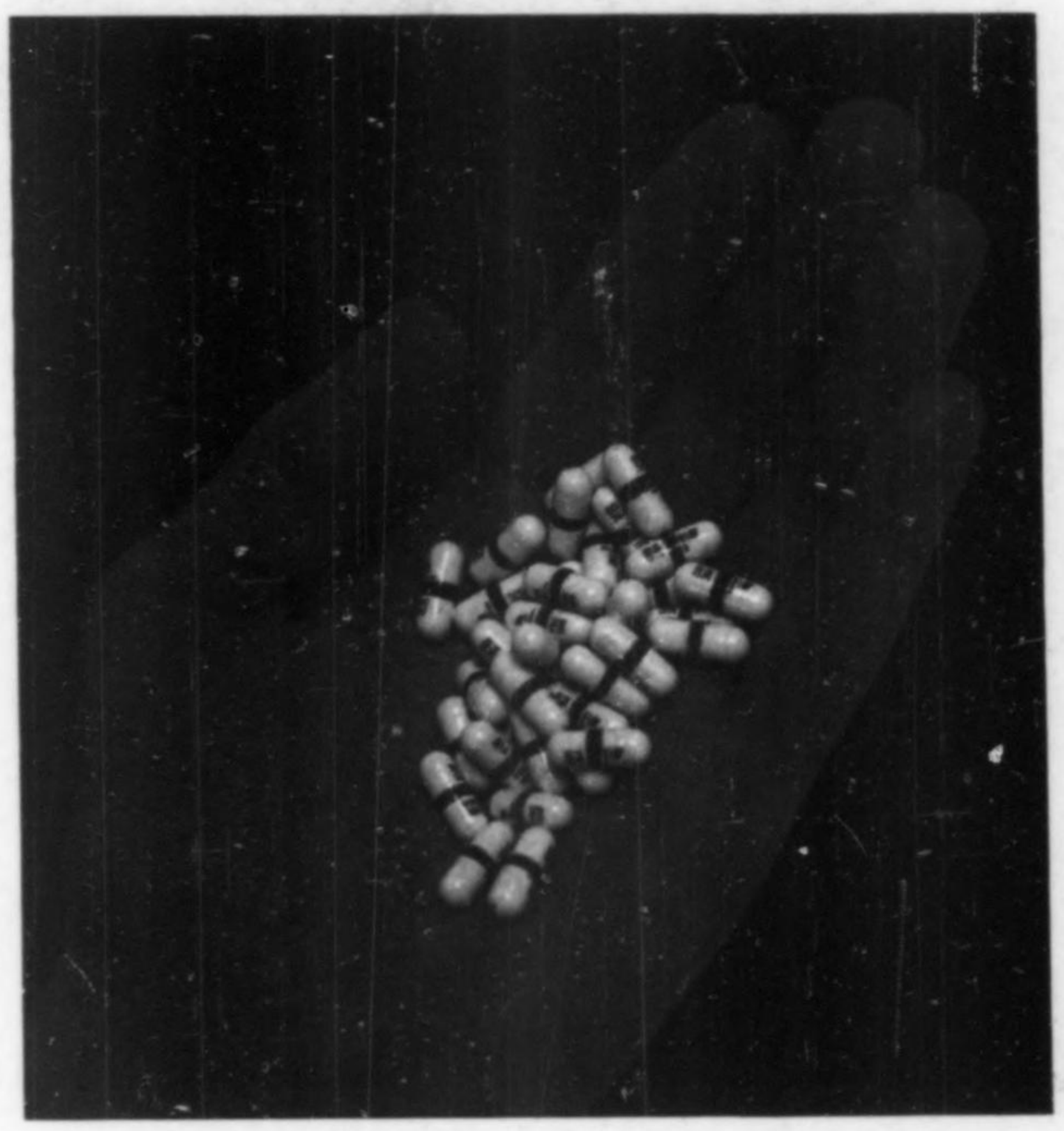
The AIDS scam



As if having Aids weren't enough . . . the big drugs companies are moving in for a killing. Duncan Campbell reports on the scramble to exploit the biggest pharmaceutical market in history: suspect drugs trials, quack remedies, overpriced drugs, toxic "cures" . . .

Bernard Crick on the KMG (Kinnock Must Go) movement

Breaking into new arias: the opera boom explained

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THE DIGGER

In his first gardening column, Michael Leapman owns up to using chemical pesticides. Shame on him.

It is a perverse time of year to initiate a gardening column, but then magazine relaunches are seldom timed to fit the horticultural calendar. If your autumn vegetables and flowers are not already sown and established there is not much I can do for you, although there still may be time (just) for new or ill-organised gardeners to rush to the market and buy plants to fill the spaces they have managed to liberate from weeds.

Be careful, though. By now many plants will have been in their pots too long. If they look straggly or sick, do not waste your money. And vow to do it properly next year. While not a purist in most respects, I do think it a bit of a cheat to buy stock that someone else has nurtured through its first formative weeks of life. From a practical standpoint it costs a lot more than growing from seed and you get a narrower choice of varieties.

Take tomatoes. Most young plants on sale in early summer are the standard sorts like Moneymaker and Amateur, or occasionally the fashionable plumper ones—Marmande or Big Boy. These are reliable but gastronomically unadventurous. (Marmande used to have a delicious Mediterranean tang but that seems to have been bred out of it for the sake of a better yield in our chillier climate.)

This year for the first time I am trying St Pierre, of medium size and reputed to be strong on flavour, plus an old favourite, Gardener's Delight. It is not much bigger than a cherry, miraculously sweet and marvellous in salads. In terms of weight, it yields poorly compared with the bigger-fruited varieties, but the taste makes it worth it. One year I tried an F1 hybrid said to have been bred from Gardener's Delight; the fruit were the same size and the yield much better, the flavour did not compare.

The tomatoes enjoyed the damp weather in May and early June and they seem more advanced than usual, as is most of the other stuff on my allotment, sited outside the walls of Brixton prison. I was picking my first tender broad beans before the end of May, something I don't remember having managed before. I sowed them last October: experts say you should wait until November, but I like to get some useful growth in before the really cold weather starts. In the previous two years most failed to survive the harsh winters and I had to replace them in the spring. This year I protected them with sprigs of foliage and in any case the winter was much milder.

One advantage of sowing broad beans in the autumn is that they are less attractive to blackfly. But the pesky aphids, not to be outsmarted, have established themselves instead on my globe artichokes. I sowed these last spring and they too overwintered well: so far, though, only two of the six have fruited, with about five artichokes on each. I know I'll offend the organic food lobby by admitting to keeping the blackfly at bay with pesticides—and I might as well reveal the whole truth here by confessing that I also use chemical fertilisers, mainly Growmore, to supplement the bags of composted manure I buy from the garden centre.

I know chemicals are supposed to be bad for you but I don't expect blackfly do you much good, either. Certainly my neighbouring plotholders would not appreciate my letting the pests multiply unchecked, however sound the ideological argument. I can only report that after 13 years of eating my poisonous produce, the family feel fine.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward introduces the country column which is radically different. It's about the city, too.

The urban fringe, that vast ragged ring, some of it actually green belt, has a bad reputation in the ideology of planners, conservationists and snobs. The distaste that is felt for the area beyond the city limits, but which isn't quite country, has its origins in psychology and aesthetics rather than in land use analysis. We acquire in childhood the perception that town is town and country is country and that the two are distinct. We carry into adult life this purified image of desirably separate places, even though, in demographic fact, most of us, here or in the United States, actually live in suburbs.

But we express our disapproval of the space which is neither city nor country nor even suburb, not in terms of childhood certainties, but in that of wasteful land use. For the planner Graham Moss, in his book on *Britain's Wasting Acres*, the urban fringe is "that chaotic mixture of rural and urban land uses in mutual conflict". For the geographer Alice Coleman, it is "an irrational land-use pattern which it was hoped would disappear after the advent of planning" but which instead "has increased".

I want to use this column to explore the present and future of Britain's urban fringe, formerly known as the countryside. But I also want to look at those huge areas of life, whether they are geographically in the fringe or in an equally unreal category, the alleged inner city, where what is variously called the black economy, the informal economy, or doing your own thing, is the most important way of sustaining convivial life.

The urban fringe is perceived as a deplorable problem, but if it has increased, it must be useful for someone. And of course it is: there is a big range of not particularly profitable, but inevitable, activities that take up a lot of space but aren't lucrative enough to pay either urban or agricultural rents. Car-breaking yards are an example. If you citizens depend on cars, they must have a penultimate resting place once you have busted or rusted them into the ground.

"Horsiculture" is another, and a growth industry too. If your children prefer riding to driving, the beasts have to be stabled and grazed. And the same goes for kennels, catteries, places where earth-moving equipment rests between jobs, or where concrete blocks are drying in the sun.

But the really big joke about the derogatory talk about the urban fringe is that it is less a land-use category than a social fact. Why do we obscure observable truths with sentimental myths and deny that the greater part of England and much of Scotland and Wales belongs to a wholly urbanised culture, or that the children of Shetland, St Ives or Anglesey follow the same fashions, respond to the same music and absorb the same half-truths as those of any British city? Their parents commute to work over what are to me unbelievable distances, but not necessarily to big urban centres: they might be driving, as they do a mile from the remote spot where I write, to a high-tech factory based on a former watermill in Suffolk.

The object of capital is to do without labour, and thanks to almost 50 years of generous subsidy, the primary rural industry, agriculture, has ensured that farm workers are a minute proportion of the rural population, as well as being the lowest paid. Unlike their employers, they've been left out of the huge benefits that accrue to their neighbours who happen to live in the country (the old-fashioned name for our all-but-universal urban fringe).

Another ex-urban East Anglian writer, Fraser Harrison, coined the useful phrase "a corrupt grief" for the habit of lamenting that simple past from which everyone actually involved thankfully escaped. There is every reason for recording and conserving the rural past and for telling the truth about it. There is no reason at all for deploring the belated invasion of rural Britain by access to metropolitan culture. Quite the contrary, since the curtailment of public transport and the fact that many services have been trimmed to serve the mobile majority, has left some rural households more isolated than at any time in the last 60 years.

But the worst aspect of that corrupting grief is the notion that the view will be desecrated by the obscene sight of another human habitation. Pull up the ladder, Jack. We're already aboard.

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Torn apart at home

I wanted him to be there to see her tears and hear her terror. I wanted him, like every child abuser before him, to be faced with the grief and suffering caused by his few selfish moments of pleasure. And then I wanted to kill him. . .

Special issue on Cleveland

Anatomy of child sexual abuse

A mother's testimony

Interview with Jane Wynne

The shadowy abuser

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THE DIGGER

Stuart Weir means to recreate the kind of carrots he ate in his salad days.

It was lunch at Andre Gorz's home in the country outside Paris which finally decided me to take vegetable gardening seriously. I hadn't tasted such carrots since when ? Well, certainly not since Fine Fare first came to Farnborough and I was still in the sixth form. They were deliciously sweet and he'd grown them himself in his rather weedy garden. He has a thoroughly sound principle for dealing with weeds: leave them be and they'll enrich your soil with minerals.

Well, that certainly made our weed-ridden garden a more likely proposition; and late though it is, I have set about clearing a plot for carrots and potatoes. According to Pam and Maria down the road, I can get in at least one crop this autumn if I sow them now. I picked my way through the couch grass and bindweed to the palisade of raspberry canes which I planted some five years ago. They've never fruited.

The soil is baked hard and larded with stones. I couldn't get the spade down deep enough to get under the roots and so I took to a fork. It buckled at once. My god, I thought, this soil's too tough for a steel fork, let alone me. Then I noticed that it had rusted through just above the prongs. (That sort of thing happens when you leave it just outside the back door.) I borrowed a fork from next door. I then took to a double strategy: first, I swiped the canes with the spade, hacking them down to about three feet high. Then I dug them out by the roots, together with the grasses and weeds which grew under their protection.

Very satisfying: the swiping especially gave a comforting illusion of progress. The only trouble now was the snails. I aspire to a decent tolerance of all other species, but these creatures had recently gobbled up loadsabulbs we bought from Marks & Spencers to prettify the nearer reaches of the garden. I decided that I should not deliberately smash any , but I need not strive too officiously to keep them alive.

Fair enough in theory, but then I found that there were literally masses of them clinging to the rigging of new green shoots and grass in the dim depths of the cane jungle. What's more, when you look closely at them, their shells are subtly differentiated. They are very elegant movers and their fine horns give them a faintly questing, intelligent look. There was only one thing for it: I began to pick them out of the wrecked rigging and deposited them in a black plastic plant pot I stuck on top of the fence.

The only trouble now was the canes. They have sharp bristles on them. I was getting scratched and thick black soil had filled up a tiny cut on my forefinger. I remembered a local newspaper item which had much amused me in my Farnborough days about a rose gardener who had died of tetanus ("no prick was found on the body") and dashed into the kitchen to wash my hands and borrow Liz's gardening gloves. By the time I returned, half of the snails had sailed out of the plant pot, many of them into the next-door garden. I caught all those I could, put the pot into a larger pot, and set off for the park.

I got back in time to clear and rake the whole patch, pile up the uprooted canes, and stand back to contemplate my achievement. Quite the nicest moment: especially as I discovered that the raspberry canes had been obscuring a small triumph: redcurrent bushes which I'd planted at the same time, and all bearing ripe round fruit. So off happily to Safeways.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward: the travellers who don't whittle clothes pegs and tell fortunes.

I was in Germany last week for the first time in my life, and I saw in the streets and squares of central Cologne posters which claimed that "The new racism now has a name: Sony". Naturally I was curious and I found that the posters reproduced what was claimed to be a letter to the Lord Mayor, Norbert Burger, from the European head of the Sony Corporation, the interestingly-named Jacob Schmuckli, under the heading The Gipsy Problem, in which the key word was *Durchgreifen*, This word means, I am told, "ruthless measures have to be taken".

There is no way I can know whether Herr Schmuckli really said such a thing to the Oberburgermeister, but for countless Germans of my generation it has echoes of the report to the Minister for Racial Affairs in 1938 from Gauleiter Portschy which argued that something must be done about the gipsy problem "for reasons of public health".

One consequence of Herr Portschy's report was that 600,000 gipsy men, women and children were exterminated in the 1940s and countless others were compulsorily sterilised. They were eliminated, along with the Jews, Communists and homosexuals. I can't imagine that this Schmuckli-person, if he actually exists, could dare make such a remark.

What I learned was that there is a place in the urban fringe of Cologne called Bickendorf where Sony has its German factory, and that the gipsies are encamped nearby. Denied their traditional occupations (who wants clothes-pegs, chair-reseating, knife-sharpening or saucepan-tinkering these days?) they are into the car-recycling and metal-recovery industries.

Naturally thefts from the supermarkets and purse-snatching from tourists are the standard complaints among Cologne's good citizens about the gipsies, I heard unusual tales about the sheer adroitness of the children in squeezing under the check-out to pass the goodies seized from the consumer counters to Papa on the outside. Mutti's voluminous skirts, I was assured, conceal a multitude of peculations by the gipsy children. And we all know how these stereotype multiply. But I assume that Jack Schmuckli is Swiss and just doesn't see how his remark would grate on modern German sensibilities, and mine.

Another thing I was told in Cologne is that an association of at least 50 professional people, paediatricians, remedial teachers and job-counsellors, are recognising the plight of the gipsies and are putting their services, free, at their disposal. This is an intriguing contrast to the British situation.

A few miles from where I live there's a road junction between the A134 and the B1087 which leads to the posh Suffolk village of Nayland. Between the river Stour and the Anglican Water Authority's pump-house there's a patch of ground never used by its owners for anything, which has for years been a seasonal camp for half a dozen caravans or trailers.

Suddenly last autumn a huge machine appeared to dig an instant trench, a deep tank-resisting ditch which ensures that no-one, gipsy or paid-up citizen, can get onto that particular site. If I telephone the County Council or the Water Authority I will get an instant assurance that this has nothing to do with any policy of *Durchgreifen*. Such an idea is merely a product of my overworked imagination. Just as it would be in Germany.

And once a year now we have National Hate Week when those hippies converge around Stonehenge, and we all have a chance to express our resentment of those inveterate criminals who constitute parasites in the bosom of our people. Apparently they aren't *genuine* gipsies who are recognisable by their habit of whittling clothes-pegs and telling fortunes as well as living in horse-drawn caravans. The fact that every traveller can be stigmatised as a spurious traveller and not the elusive and romantic real thing enables local authorities to avoid their statutory duty to provide sites and enables us to vent our hatred of anyone who lives in an old bus and doesn't pay rates.

Step by step, with the changes in housing benefit, the Housing Bill and the impending poll tax, the good citizens are creating the situation where ruthless measures have to be taken, not by government but by those people who have the nerve to adopt the gispy lifestyle. It's not my idea of a good life, but I'm not in their situation.

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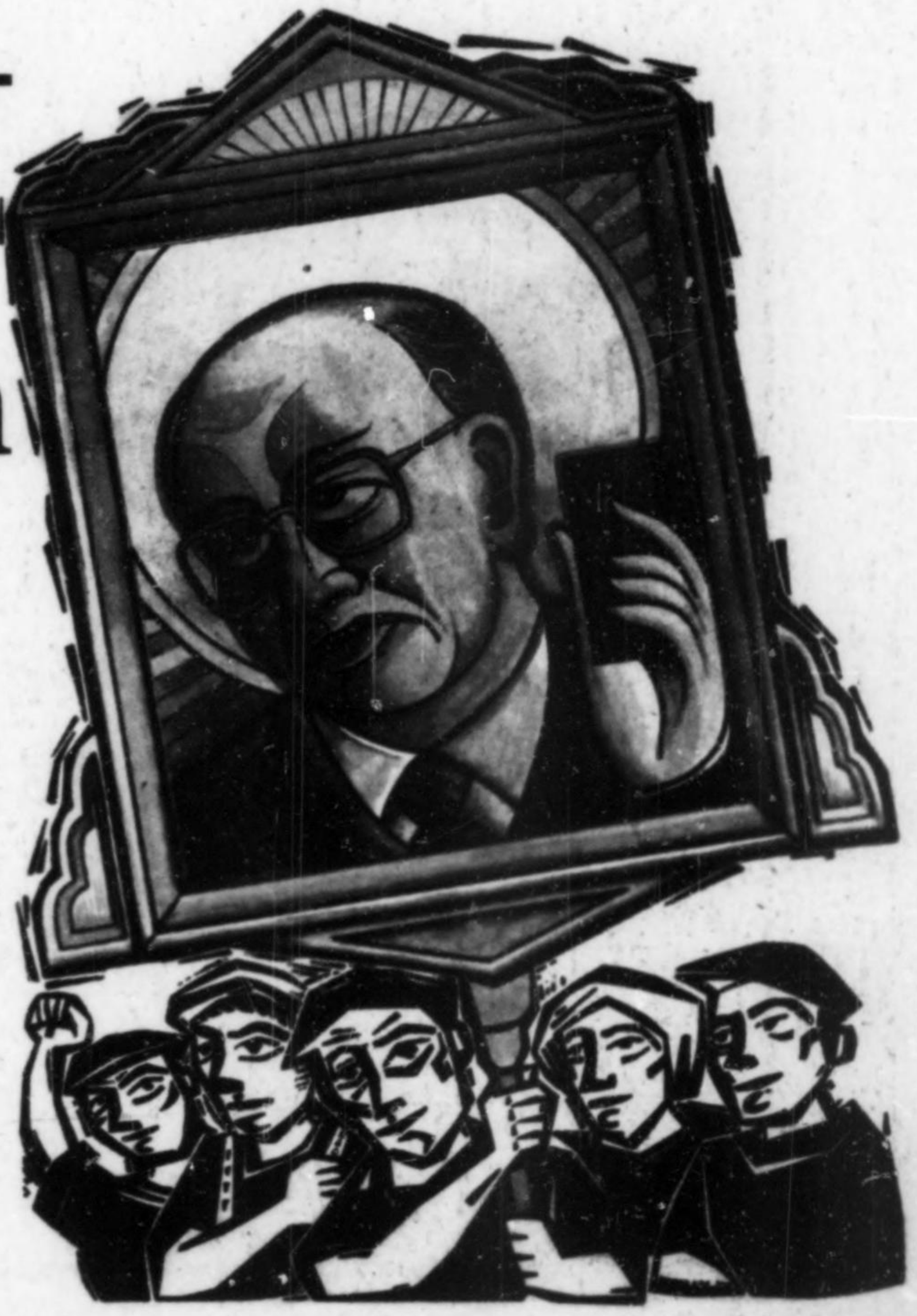
Beginning again

Nial Abdulin, 32, a Soviet power worker, was asked: 'What, if anything, will be different in your life when the Moscow conference is over?' He replied with a single word: 'Hope'. But hope is a dangerous substance...



Alexander Cockburn on the Iranian Airbus atrocity

The verdict on Cleveland

Patrick Wright on the revival of British art

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THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman bites back on the pesticide issue: what spud do you like?

When I took on this column I had not expected to be abused in the headline of the very first instalment. "Shame on him," wrote the sub-editor, responding to my revelation that I do not abjure chemical pesticides or fertilisers. I want to dispose of this issue right away, with a quick burst of the spray gun, before it becomes the *leitmotif* of the whole enterprise.

It is a question of degree. Obviously there are some chemicals I would not use on the allotment on pragmatic grounds—cyanide, for instance, or napalm to burn off the weeds. On the matter of ethics the position is less clear cut. Those who argue passionately for natural methods forget that the whole of horticulture is unnatural. Left to itself, the allotment would not grow vegetables in neat rows but would be a mass of dense herbage. (Some unimpressed visitors contend it is rather like that now.)

Look at it this way. The blackfly have me to thank for the succulent broad bean plants that attract them. Tough luck that I curtail their illicit feast with my chemical spray, but I do not see that in using it I am guilty of distorting nature to any greater extent than I was by cultivating the plot in the first place. I judge aphids and broad beans to be equally incapable of experiencing pain, and in any conflict between them I know whose side I am on.

Enough of this: to my oats, or rather to my spuds. I usually get three rows of potatoes from a 13lb bag of seed. (When I write of rows I mean a standard allotment row of 25 tion—gardeners will resist metrication to the last.) For the past few seasons I have grown Marfona, a newish second early variety which matures a couple of weeks before the main crop from a late March sowing.

Last year we had a damp June and July and the yield was marvellous: good fat potatoes equally suitable for baking, roasting, boiling and mashing. Kept in a shed behind the house, they lasted us through until May. This year has been drier and I have been soaking the emerging plants with the hose from time to time. Now, with the flowers appearing, the experts say I should be conscientiously earthing them up by drawing the soil around them to make a ridge, preventing the tubers from getting too close to the surface. The tool to use for this is a draw hoe, with which you can theoretically carve a neat little gully between the rows.

The trouble is that after all that watering the ground is as hard as concrete in places and the hoe makes little impression: experts tend not to take account of that kind of practical problem. If the rows were a bit farther apart I could use a spade, but I am always looking to save space in the spring and planted them too close together. So they will have to go largely unearthed this year and it will be interesting to see what effect that has on the yield.

If you like new potatoes, it's time to take a trial digging of one or two to see if any are of a useful size yet. I'm too mean to do much of that. I prefer to let them mature and get the best possible value in terms of tonnage: never mind the delicate flavour, feel the weight. For the same reason I am reluctant to harvest things like lettuce, carrots and turnips until they have grown to their full size. The result is that they are all ready at the same time and I have to give the bulk of them away to prevent them running to seed.

We gardeners get set in our ways and are reluctant to learn from experience.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward finds a group of young, unemployed people in Hull are building their own enterprise.

Despite the Humber Bridge, Hull is a city too far out on a limb to have an office boom like Leeds or a shopping boom like Sheffield. Its port is a shadow, its fishing a memory and its shipbuilding a ghost. Its biggest industry is education.

One effect of Hull's isolation and depression is that Victorian terraced houses to which little has been done for decades are still relatively cheap. Forty-seven per cent of the housing stock belongs to the council yet at least 3,500 families are officially described as homeless, and this minimal figure ignores the young, single and footloose and all those teenagers leaving home after a family row or a broken marriage.

Three years ago, young, unemployed Reg Salmon borrowed enough in small loans from trusting friends to get a mortgage on a small house which together they set about renovating. With that house as security they got a bank loan to buy a second house. Then with the help of Humberside Cooperative Development Agency they set up a building cooperative, Giroscope Ltd, whose five other directors are Robert Amesbury, Martin Newman, Sarah Paton, Michael Shutt and Simon Wheatley. All are under 25 and all were unemployed.

The directors who got the £40 a week paid under the enterprise allowance scheme pooled it with those who got £30 a week dole. The aims of the co-op are "the purchase, renovation, modernisation and furnishing of houses in a poor condition" and "the renting out of these house to unemployed people and to other disadvantaged groups in society, such as single parents and disabled people."

The co-op now has six houses and accommodates 25 young unemployed people and four children. Two more houses are on the way. Having earned credibility it finds it easier to get loans and has benefited from grants from the Hull and East Riding Charitable Trust and from Charity Projects. Its members pay themselves no more than the £30 a week they would get on the dole.

I found them in their office in Glencoe Street, off the Anlaby Road, and asked about their future. They explained how everything had got better as they went along. Their first house had depended totally on mutual trust and on robbing Peter to pay Paul. By now they had all acquired building skills and experience, as well as management know-how, and were in good standing with builders' merchants. A network of well-wishers tipped them off about cheap houses coming onto the market. They believe that once they have bought and renovated 20 houses their operation will be self-financing. They don't want to grow indefinitely and they don't want to become a convenience for the city's social services.

They are willing to train people and to share their experience, though they warned that, especially with the impact of the new social security regulations on the homeless young, their precariously balanced budget would only work in those northern towns and cities where it is still possible to buy houses cheaply and to put in a great deal of work.

From experience they scorn the government's faith in the private landlord.

"Many of the people operating in the private rented sector," they declare, "are tyrants for whom extortion, intimidation, violence, humiliation and overt prejudice are an everyday part of their business.

Much of the accommodation available is squalid, damp, verminous, cold, small and insecure. Contacting the Fair Rent Officer or Environmental Health Department often results in illegal (and possibly violent) eviction."

When I asked the co-op members why their example hadn't been followed all over the place, they laughed. "It depends on three things," Reg Salmon explained. "One is being willing to work very hard. Another is to do it for very little money. And the third is the one that makes sense of the other two: a kind of political and social awareness."

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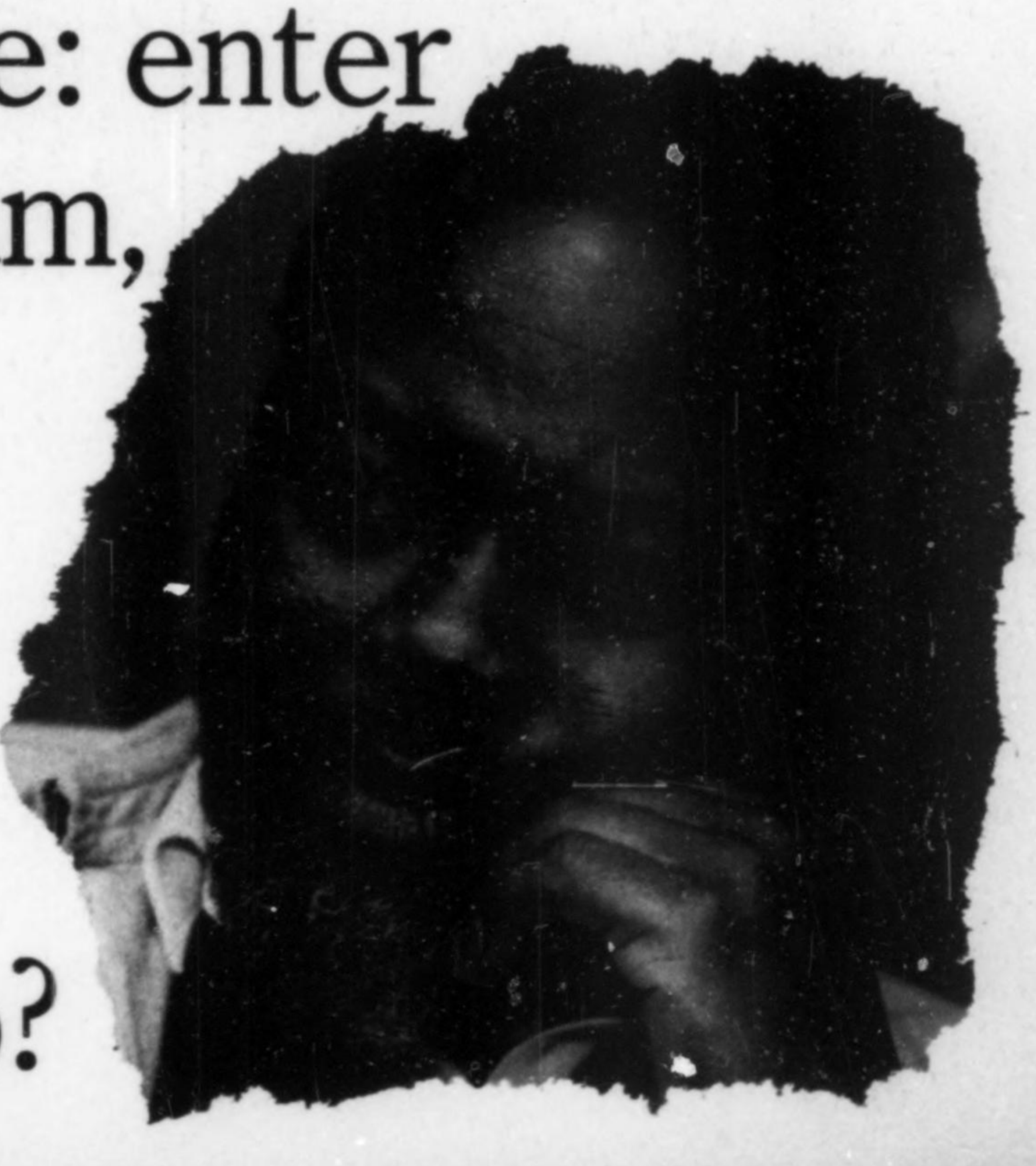
New black power lines

The crisis of black Britain is remaking urban politics. It's said the ghetto godfathers are being eclipsed by militants. Black politicians agonise over their response: enter the mainstream, join the hard left, take to the streets? Which way will they jump?



Beatrix Campbell takes on Cleveland MP Stuart Bell

John Berger: the retreat into private life

Suzanne Moore: what British women want

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THE DIGGER

Jolyon Jenkins owns up to keeping a Big Boy on his Lambeth balcony

Vita Sackville-West used to write handy gardening tips like: "Even if you only have a small garden of 100 feet or so, do not despair. You still have room for a couple of trees and a small pond." Or: "Every house has four walls, so you can always grow things up them."

Some hope. My flat has a windy balcony of eight feet or so, which, were I an estate agent, I should describe as "ideal for barbecues"—though they would have to be small, intimate, and standing. There are outside walls front and back, but with children roller-skating along the deck outside the front door all day it would be foolish to try to grow anything there. Some people do cultivate the deck, which I take as proof that this is one of Lambeth council's more desirable estates.

The balcony is home to my two monster tomato plants. One of them may well be a Big Boy; the other almost certainly isn't. To hell with speciesism: I treat them both exactly the same. They have been flourishing since I took courage and installed them outside four weeks ago. Before that they were on the window sill, behind the net curtains. They were producing plenty of flowers, but, with only the occasional housefly to help fertilisation along, the "trusses" (as we call them) were refusing to "set". Now they have six fruits between them; the biggest, to my paternal eye, looks as if it could be at least one centimetre in diameter. When the first is ripe I shall harvest it, slice it very thinly with a razor blade, and grill it with garlic and a sprig of basil.

Perhaps. My previous efforts have not been conspicuously successful. I first tried growing tomatoes five summers ago when I lived in St Pauls in Bristol: I had four plants in growbags nestling among jungly cow parsley at the bottom of the garden. I managed to fight off the slugs, but not the University of Bristol accommodation office, which evicted me before the fruits could ripen, on the grounds that having graduated I had no right to stay in their property. Six flats and two years later I got my second garden, in a short-life property in Hackney. I spent many weekends clearing the undergrowth, but before I could plant I had to flee: I could just about take the woman in the basement with her 30 pet rats, but not the nocturnal knife fights between two other residents.

It's not all plain sailing up here either. Watering can cause trouble: too much and it seeps down into the flat below; but since I only discharge one teapot-full at a time this has not yet been a problem. And the wind is a nuisance. The sweet peas kept keeling over until I secured them with cotton, whereupon they garotted themselves on the cotton and snapped. A friend's flowerpots blew off altogether onto the balcony below: a sensitive and liberal woman, it now breaks her heart to have to tie down her plants with string. But gardening at high altitude has unexpected advantages. For example, only the most determined slugs and snails can get up here by their own locomotion. I may achieve self-sufficiency yet.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward remembers depopulation and discovers a barn job

A century ago politicians of both major parties were preoccupied with one great worry known as the "depopulation of the countryside". Like drink and debauchery, it was seen as a major social evil. Calculations from census returns showed that the number of persons gainfully employed in agriculture had fallen by 50 per cent between 1851 and 1901. This was actually an exaggeration of an unmistakable trend but it led the Board of Acriculture to commission a report on the problem. This attributed the decline to unsuitable education, poor housing, the pleasures of city life, the low wages in agriculture and the higher wages in industry, and the lack of chances for advancement in agricultural work.

The good and the great worried away at the spectre of rural depopulation; however, they failed to attribute it to the depression of British agriculture that began in the 1870s and continued, with just a brief recovery when the young men from the country were being slaughtered in droves in Flanders, until the Second World War. Anyone over 60 can remember the prewar farming scene of blocked ditches, overgrown hedges, thistles and "dog and stick" farmers in constant fear of bankruptcy. Those who imagine that the land is full of immemorial wisdom handed down from father to son have to be reminded that the War Agricultural Committees had to borrow ploughmen from East Anglia to teach farmers in the shires how to plough.

The fact that both in 1916 and 1941 Britain was brought within weeks of famine because of the submarine blockade led both to the capital-intensive rather than the labour-intensive pattern of postwar farming and to its remarkably privileged position in the British economy. Other European governments have used the Common Agricultural Policy to support the small producer, often a part-time farmer. In Britain it has been applied in a way that enables the big producer to get bigger, and richer.

Public perception of rural Britain ignored the fact that farm work occupied a continually diminishing proportion of the rural population. Planning policy, mindful of "those precious agricultural acres" sought to freeze rural Britain in a snapshot of 1948. New housing in the country, outside "key" villages was only to be permitted if it was to provide homes for farm workers, even though their numbers had fallen from two million at the turn of the century, to 160,000 today.

The result was every kind of subterfuge to persuade the development control officer that auntie, who wanted a house in the country, was really a shepherdess. And in the 1950s and 1960s, zealous public health inspectors from the then rural district councils would slap a closure order on every tied cottage once a retired farmworker's widow had finally expired and before it came on the market, on the grounds that the ceiling heights were lower than those prescribed in the one-time Model Bylaws of the Ministry of Health.

Cottages that would delight conservationists and historians of vernacular architecture, and which would be worth a mint of money today, were pulled down to ensure that dispersed settlements, except for those of farmers and land-owners, were eliminated. Then there were barns, those heroic structures that are no longer needed since contract harvesting requires no on-farm storage space. Ten years ago they were being pulled down because there was a market for the superb oak posts and beams, the acres of clay roof tiles and the paving bricks. Lovers of vernacular buildings were driven to despair.

Gradually, planning departments retreated from their refrigeration policy to one which allows the conversion of barns to houses. Builders are becoming used to taking on "barn jobs". Speculators, known as "developers" scour the countryside for barns, cowsheds and piggeries that are ripe for conversion.

Some are excellent and ought to delight anyone who would rather see an old building used than be a picturesque relic or a museum of rural life. Others are hilarious bits of Disney make-believe, rebuilt from scratch. All are pricey.

Barn conversions here have the same status as loft conversions in New York. Neither are for the grandchildren of those who sweated for a living in them and were thankful to escape and get a living wage.

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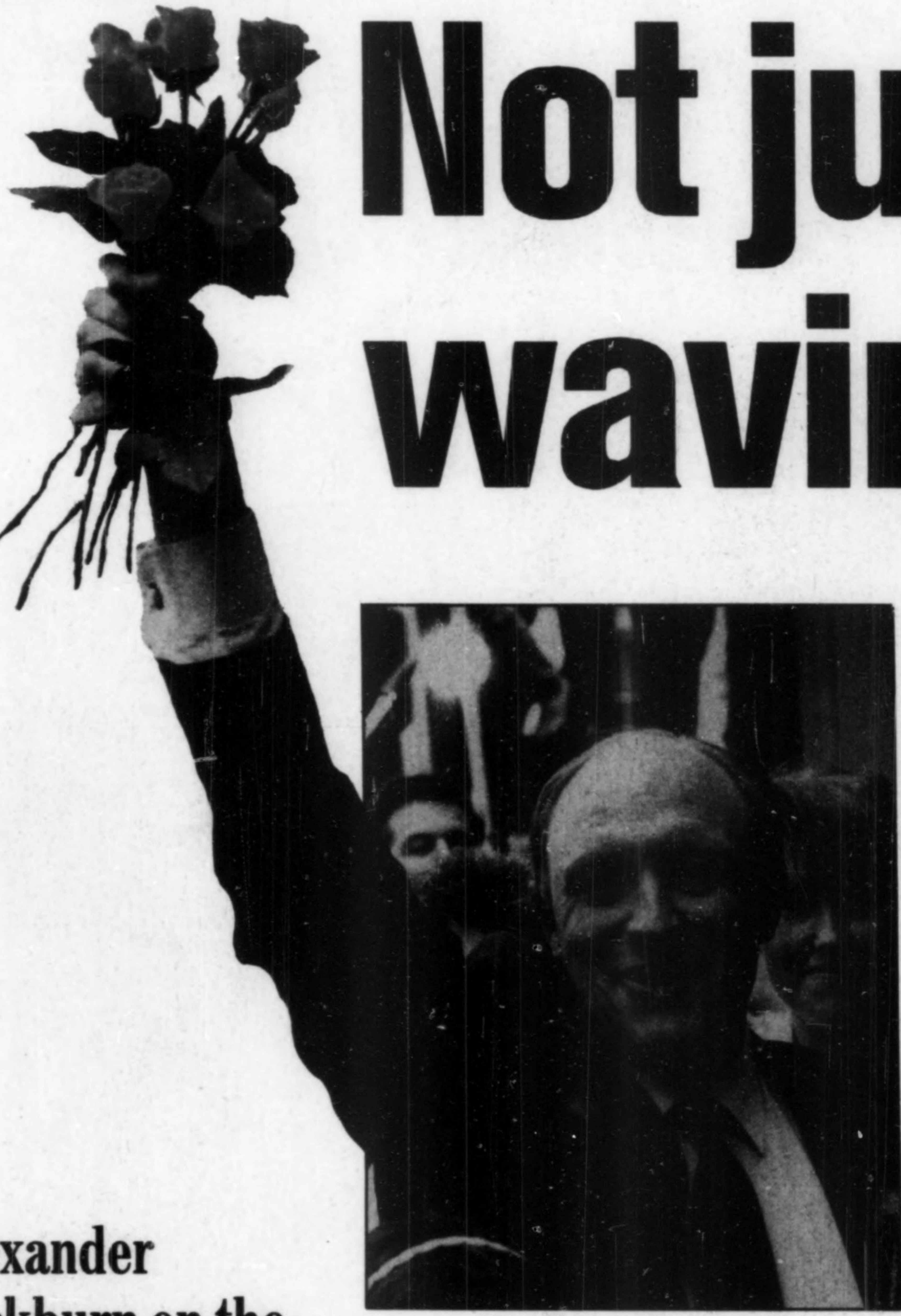

Not just waving...

...but drowning. Gordon Brown is admired, John Smith respected, Robin Cook feared, Neil Kinnock discounted by the Tories. Serious Labour MPs despair of Kinnock's leadership. How long can he survive?

Alexander Cockburn on the Dukakis campaign

Jacqueline Rose: Ruth Ellis and Margaret Thatcher, victim and executioner

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THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman gives his down-to-earth views on sowing in midsummer

The seed packets and gardening books tell us there is still time to make our last successional sowings of summer vegetables such as carrots, radishes, peas and lettuce. But I suspect the concept of successional sowing is more honoured on the printed page than on the plot itself. "Put in a few seeds every fortnight to avoid a glut," the experts advise sagely. But even if you are that well organised, where do you find the space? By May my allotment is usually bursting at the seams, and I have to give away plants from the main spring sowing.

By now, it is true, some space is opening up. The broad beans and early peas are finished and the turnips, spinach and earliest lettuce are running to seed. If you planted any over-wintering Japanese onion sets last autumn they will have matured already. (Or a few will: I have grown them for the last three or four seasons and have never been able to get more than a handful to develop properly. The Japanese should perhaps stick to electronics.)

Yet even if you now have the space, sowing in midsummer is not as easy as the seed salesmen would have us think. True, the soil is warm, so germination should be rapid. But it is also often hard and dusty—not at all the soggy, welcoming texture of the spring. Watering can compact it even more. You need to incorporate a lot of moist compost to get it into the proper condition for sowing.

Even then, you're gambling with the weather. If we are in for a warm, dry spell you will have to water every couple of days to keep the seedlings going: no use if you are about to go off on holiday, but then *real* gardeners don't take holidays. (Watering is not much of a chore if you are growing the stuff in your garden, but my Brixton allotment is a ten-minute drive away. I normally only get out there at weekends, although in very hot weather I have added a midweek visit for irrigation and harvesting.)

Lettuce, in particular, does best in cool weather. It will not tolerate extreme heat. Some years ago I had a garden in New York and I could never get lettuce to survive beyond the end of June in that over-heated climate. Brixton is less tropical, and it is certainly worth trying a late sowing, although my own strike rate with them is only around 50 per cent. Mildew and other diseases are more prevalent in the hot weather.

Some varieties of lettuce are designed for sowing towards the end of August, missing the worst of the heat, maturing in October and November. These will generally work if there is not a prolonged warm spell and drought in September. I have also had modest success with the autumn-sown varieties designed to survive the winter and head up in spring: Valdor and Arctic King are two. These are naturally rather tougher than those harvested in summer but they appear at a time when lettuce is dear in the shops. (Beware the Iceberg trap. Despite its name, it is a crisp summer variety introduced from the US a few years ago. At the first sign of ice it will perish.)

We had a tremendous crop of raspberries this year. The canes are ten years old now and according to the best books they should be replaced, but it seems like vandalism to pull them up when they are so prolific. Now is the time to act to ensure next year's crop. The canes that fruited this year should be cut back to ground level, the rest tidied up and thinned out, leaving next year's crop space to develop. Think ahead.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward marches into the field of rural repopulation by the rich

John MacGregor, the Minister of Agriculture, told the Commons last month that annual payments of up to £200 a hectare will be offered to farmers who set aside at least a fifth of their arable land by taking it out of production for five years. To qualify, land would have to be kept fallow or put to woodland; it could not be grazed or developed for residential, industrial or retail purposes.

Quick as a flash, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) responded with a discussion paper suggesting that rather than paying farmers to "set aside" up to a million acres, it would be more sensible to change the land use from farming and turn it into "country estates" with planning consent for a suitable house, stables, ponds and parkland and, of course, a few staff cottages.

Here is a nice example of the survival of Victorian values: this is exactly what happened 100 years ago, when in the agricultural depression the newly rich bought their way into rural lifestyles. The venerable weekly *Country Life* was founded to give them hints on keeping up with the county families. A wave of newly-established rival journals shows that this aspiration has been revived.

There is another reason, of course, for the RICS paper. A Norwich surveyor explains that estates of 50 to a 100 acres could be sold at, say, £15,000 an acre instead of the figure of £100,000 now being charged for a single plot with planning permission. The Norwich surveyor said he was besieged with inquiries like, "Should we buy land in order to get it set aside?"

In the process of rural repopulation, planning consent is worth 100 times its weight in gold. But it isn't easily won, so if the bottom really is dropping out of the grotesquely subsidised cereal prices of the last decade, and thus land prices, it's as well to settle for what you can get.

It was like this, of course, long before we were alleged to have a planning system. In 1875, Tarbuck's *Handbook of House Property* included the apt little verse: "The richest crop for any field/Is a crop of bricks for it to yield./The richest crop that it can grow/Is a crop of houses all in a row." At that time everyone deplored the way the country was being de-populated by the poor. Now—apart from the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors—we deplore the way in which it is being repopulated by the rich. Years ago the geographer Peter Hall described the green belt as "a civilised form of apartheid" and the whole machinery of planning, justified for its allegedly redistributive effect, has been hijacked by the secure and affluent to bolster their automatic freedom of choice.

In my own patch, unofficial bodies like the Suffolk Rural Housing Association, with little support and less cash, have been drawing attention to the plight of local people setting up home, let alone job seekers in growing East Anglia, hopelessly outclassed in the property boom.

Our local *East Anglian Daily Times*, not known for its radicalism, comments editorially that, "A number of councillors, speaking from experience, saw little or no hope of the ordinary house buyer receiving any benefit from cheaper land prices. Builders, in their view, were unduly involved with land-hoarding and speculation. Since the development value of land is created entirely by the community, it is right that the community should benefit from it. A tax on it would be fair and it would lead to cheaper housing and to better planning. It is impossible to understand why the government should be considering any other form of replacement for rates."

This is an absolutely crucial issue in rural England, with speculators balancing their chances of set-aside or sell-off, determined by a district council's development control officer, but modified by the local assessment of the way the DoE will swing on appeal. This ministerial judgment is in fact the way in which policy is revealed to those hard-pressed local officers. Mr Ridley has just issued two new policy statements on rural housing. I shall study them eagerly.

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Politics is boring

Politics is not where you invest your hopes. Life is elsewhere. Politics means taxes and petty regulations. It's a nuisance. This is Mrs Thatcher's unseen triumph: she's sold politics off too.

Taken for a ride: Chippendale and and Horrie on the new BR

1688 and all that: costume drama in Littlecote

Eco-sounding: Greenpeace's new tactics

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THE DIGGER

Stuart Weir prepares for war around his newly sewn vegetable patch

I am always moved by the signs of precarious human cultivation in remote and wild countryside, and my tidy pocket of ordered soil in the wilderness of our back garden inspires something of the same emotion, mingled with a spot of pride. I have now cleared and weeded a vegetable patch, about eight yards' square, and sewn a packet of carrot seeds. Everywhere else nature, green in tooth and claw, rages abundant.

There is a pathetic fallacy about plant life. It's somehow regarded as the peaceful side of nature's character. That's not my experience. My back garden is desperately competitive in a way which would warm Mrs Thatcher's heart. My honeysuckle is especially ruthless, smothering shrubs and seizing flowers yards away with its creepers. Only last year I planted an innocent-looking plant with soft purple blooms at the end of a flower bed. It turned into a monster quite as tall as me and engulfed the whole bed; I had to hack through the stems with a spade to free a precious Peruvian tree I planted years ago which obstinately refuses to grow above nine inches tall. But I also uncovered a second redcurrent bush, brimming over with bright red berries. I am not quite sure if the first bush has spawned this one, or if I originally planted two and simply forgot. Who cares? The fruit is delicious.

Like the hunchback hero of *Jean de Florette*, I garden by the book. I bought a guide, entitled something like *Be Your Own Vegetable Expert*, but it's lost somewhere in the sargasso sea of toys and children's books in the front room. Looking for it, however, I chanced upon Topsy and Tim's adventures in the garden. Topsy and Tim are the kind of kids you'd like to drown, but I have to admit that the book is a jolly good guide to planting carrot seeds.

Its drawback is that Topsy and Tim's garden is as cloyingly lovesome as they are. The soil is perfect and doesn't suck seeds down into potential oblivion as the heaving, sodden mass I consign them to seems likely to do. Nor do voracious snails lie in wait for their seedlings; nor worse still do species of vicious insect (about which my *Vegetable Expert* warned me) hang around waiting for the tiny tots to bungle the "pinching out"—thinning out the seedlings—so that they can come in and ruin the entire crop. Is it right, I wonder, to protect children from the harsh realities of life in the garden?

Heaven knows what I can do to keep off these mysterious insects. According to the book, they need only the scent of a single bruised carrot seedling to home in like a homopterous exocet for the kill. But at least I can prepare against the snails. Some on the libertarian left use pellets which dry the poor creatures up. (I'm naming no names.) For the time being I am going to build what is apparently (for snails) an impenetrable wall of crushed egg shells round the vegetable patch. It should be in place by the time the carrots stir themselves. That is, if we can all stomach eating so many bloody eggs.

My ambition, as some of you may recall, is to grow really sweet and wholesome carrots for the winter. Francis Wheen recently tried to give me some encouragement with a mouth-watering description of some sweet carrots he'd just eaten. My worry is that his carrots were short and stubby, mine (if they ever emerge) will be long and even.

Now I could have bought seeds of the stubby variety, but the instructions on all the packets insisted on sewing early. The only packets which declared themselves suitable for sewing in July pictured perfect-looking specimens which looked as though they belonged on a neon-lit supermarket shelf and tasted like balsa wood. Even as I was buying them I wondered if I shouldn't have disobeyed the instructions on the packets and gone for the more sympathetic looking ones. Have I bottled out?

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward on changing attitudes to the village school

In Charsfield, Suffolk, and the villages around, plenty of people stayed up recently until the absurd hour of 12.55am, just to see Channel 4's revival of Peter Hall's film adaptation of Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield*.

It makes riveting watching to glimpse people you actually know, acting out the roles of their grand parents, especially as for some of them the film itself is now a period piece. For the primary school children in the film are now in their twenties, and were watching out indulgently for a nice photogenic accident that occurred in its making.

Teacher, realistically playing the part of her severe predecessor, admonished one infant so sternly that he, never having been addressed like this in his life, crumpled into uncontrollable sobbing. Of course, once the scene was shot, everyone rushed forward to console him and to stress that it was only a game.

It was a reminder that the village school, whose survival is a matter of vital concern up and down the country today, was once a hard, tough and limiting environment. There has been a striking change in our response to the actual words "village school".

Ronald Blythe himself expressed this very accurately when he wrote in 1980, "For some time after the last war these schools lacked any kind of charm and were even found hateful, as being remnants of an all too easily remembered poverty, both physical and intellectual, and sometimes of brutality. Those who attended them breathed a sigh of relief when they were closed down and their children bussed to new sunny primaries miles away. However, as with all things, the day of re-evaluation has dawned..."

It has indeed. You have only to open a local paper in the shires to read reports of "Save Our School" campaigns by rural parents. The school at Charsfield itself (Blythe's Akenfield), along with that at Little Bealings, has been threatened by closure by the county council, followed by protests, meetings and a delegation to the Secretary of State. It was reprieved last month.

In Burston, Norfolk, with immense irony, the seventieth anniversary of the Burston Strike School, set up by parents in an epic village struggle against the sacking of teachers by the local plutocracy of sporting parson and farming landowners, was celebrated by a demonstration in support of Burston County Primary School, threatened with closure by the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the pupils who walked out of it in 1914 and attended the Strike School from 1918 to 1939.

Village schools have changed immeasurably since those days, but the change in parents' and educators' perceptions of appropriate school size are much more recent. In the sixties the Plowden report made recommendations on school size, which Lady Plowden herself has abandoned. Her old criteria are still used as a basis for closure by county councils, usually supported by the Secretary of State, in spite of his electioneering promise to rural voters.

Parents nowadays expect teachers to be local, friendly and approachable, not an annual meeting many miles away, but in an informal day-to-day relationship. Assumptions about class and culture made this impossible in the past, when Teacher was regarded with fear.

The changed relationship between parent and school (something Mr Baker is alleged to be keen about) is precisely why they are hurt and bewildered at the thought that their hopes for their five-to-eleven year-olds cannot be met in their own village.

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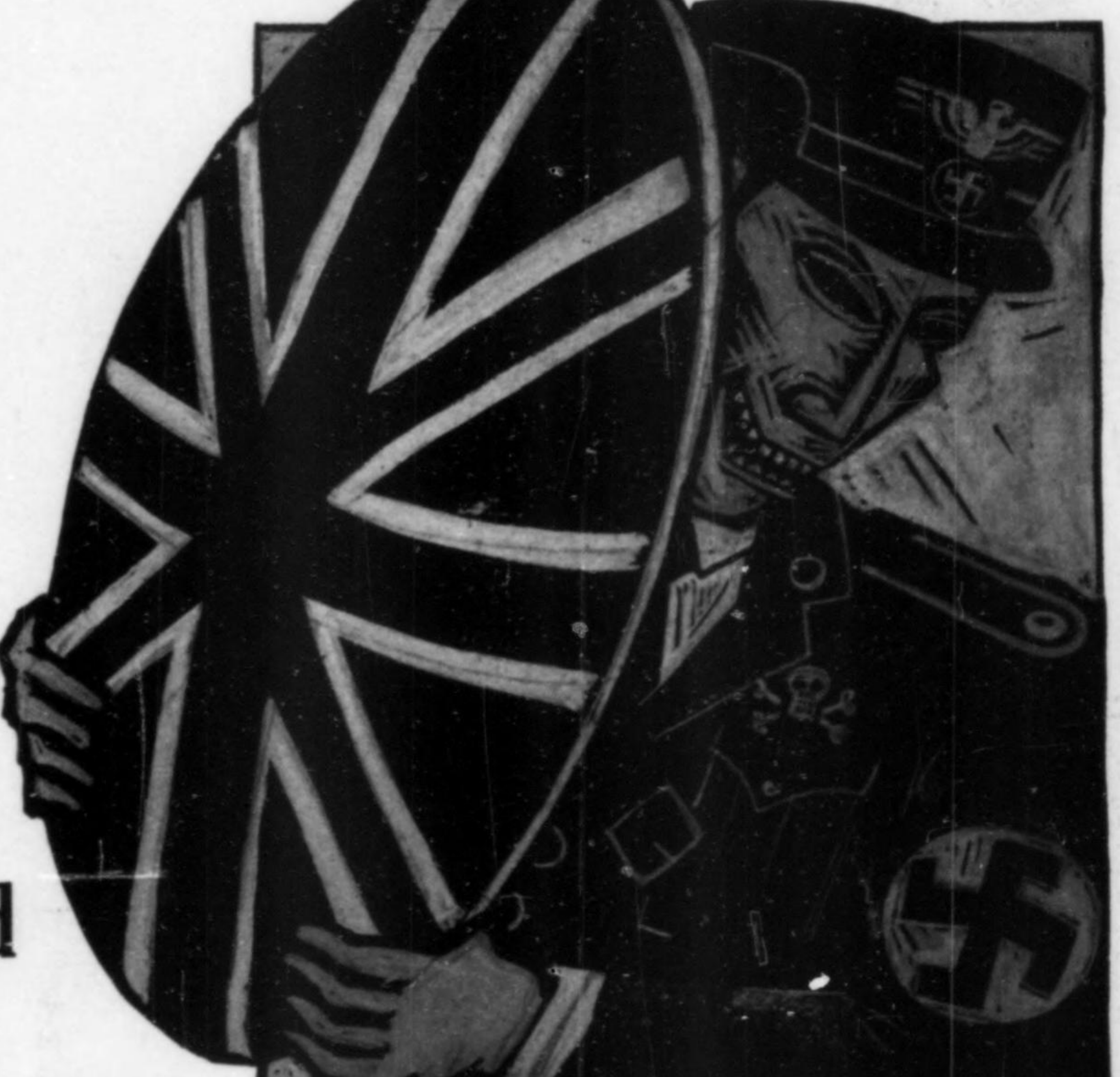
Our Nazi secret



For 40 years Britain has been hiding away Nazi war criminals and their collaborators. Both Labour and Tory governments have lied and lied again about this vile secret. Why have they been allowed to get away with it?

Divine madness: Brent's road to hell

Patrick Wright: the great telecoms style war

Picturing men's bodies

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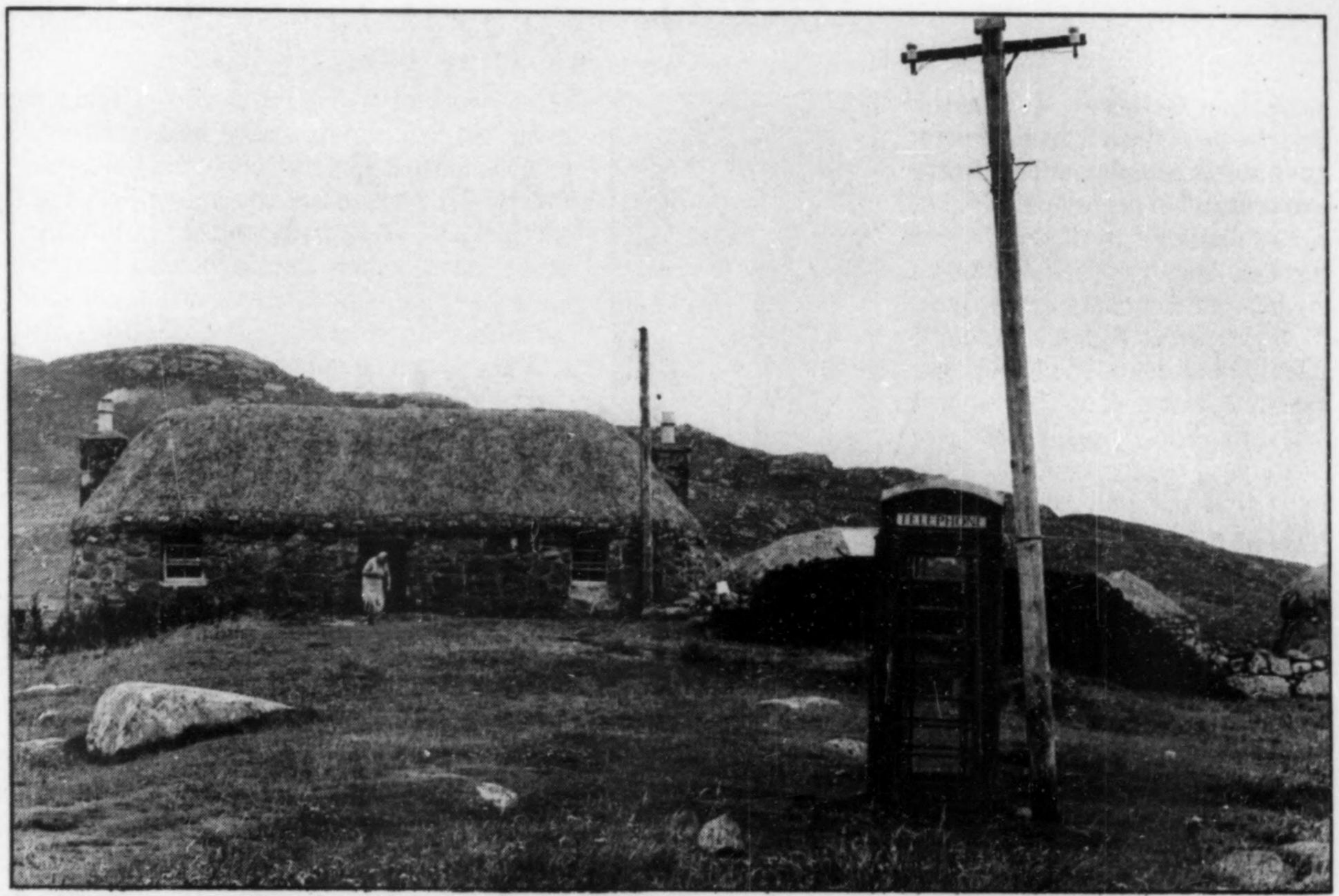

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THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman finds after our British summer the soggy "Sun" has its uses... in the garden

I wrote the other week that real gardeners don't take holidays. Some of us, though, succumb to family pressure. We put in a lot of spadework with the neighbours beforehand, making elaborate arrangements for plots and plants to be watered while we are away.

Returning this time, I found that none of it was necessary. Record July rainfall meant that the most useful thing the neighbours could have done was to put a cover over the allotment, like a test match wicket. This might not have been too good for the vegetables but it would at least have kept down the weeds and snails that took advantage of the conditions to run rampant.

The snails had clearly enjoyed my lettuce (Webb's Wonderful—like me, they enjoy the traditional varieties best). As for the weeds, my runner beans were worst afflicted. This is because for the last few years I have grown dwarf runners, a variety called Pickwick, that reach only about two feet high.

I decided on that course mainly through shame. Carpentry has never been my strong suit and the support structures I built for my runners, plastic netting stretched untidily between poles, could never compare with the elaborate devices erected by my neighbouring plot-holders, using tall, stout sticks and even old gas pipes.

Last year one of my neighbours countered my dwarf ploy by growing Pickwick himself (*as well as* a full-length variety, mind). As soon as they started producing beans he began to tell me how stringy they were, compared with his usual varieties. I said I had never found that a problem. Indeed, I insisted boldly, we thought the beans remarkably tender. But to press home his point, my uncompromising neighbour scornfully ripped out all his dwarf plants after the first couple of pickings.

Confronted with such blatant moral pressure, the only way to save face was defiantly to sow Pickwick again this year. But on my first visit to the plot after the holiday they were invisible. The fleeting suspicion that my neighbour had ripped *mine* up this time proved unfounded when I noticed a few scarlet flowers poking through a thick clump of weeds.

I recalled that Pickwick aren't too fond of competition for their air space. Last year I sowed them too close to the potatoes and they languished until I dug up the spuds, when they roared quickly into action. Now the weeds have been cleared from around them, they are already starting to bean with enthusiasm.

In a fit of perversity, or what I suppose amounts to a macho gesture in gardening terms, I also sowed some climbing French beans this year, so I had to display my paltry skills with the Netlon, string and stakes after all. These have germinated poorly, though. They look dreadfully straggly compared with the lush growth on the neighbours' runners. Probably it is because last winter I did not get around to preparing a trench lined with soggy newspapers—a traditional method of growing beans that has worked well for me in the past. The *Sun* works best because... well, fill in your own payoff line.

In a way, it is lucky the climbing beans have not done better. Last week's high winds would, I am sure, have blown them to the ground were it not for the large gaps that allowed the gusts through. As it was, they swayed alarmingly and another windy spell could still put paid to them. Next year I really must get some proper material and build a stable support structure. I don't want nonconformity to turn into an obsession. Anyone got any old gas pipes?

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward seeks Robert Owen's ghost at New Lanark and meets a lumpen communard

Fifteen years ago, writing a school book on utopias, I went to Robert Owen's New Lanark in its spectacular gorge near the Falls of Clyde, which provided the power for the monumental cotton mills that once employed 2,000 people.

It was a ghost village. The Gourock Ropework Company had closed in 1968, and a firm called Metal Extraction had bought it and filled it with aluminium slag. Junk was everywhere and even the roof of Owen's famous school had caved in. Better a humble use than demolition, I supposed, but the metal firm only employed eight people in this area of high unemployment.

Of the handful of people and bodies interested in this particular slice of our history, none could conceivably take on the prohibitive cost of restoring the place. Yet it presents a truer picture of Scotland's heritage than all the *Bonny Prince Charlie slept here* industry. David Dale, a Glasgow banker, built the mills and a big house for the 500 pauper children he imported from Edinburgh. Then he built more to attract the poverty-stricken farm workers. Finally he found at Greenock a shipload of families from Skye, victims of the Highland Clearances destined to be forcibly dumped in North America. By 1796 he had four mills with 1,340 workers, 750 of them children, half of whom were under nine, working from six in the morning until seven at night.

An everyday story of the industrial revolution in fact. But then came Owen, who had left school at nine in Wales and before he was 20 was the manager of the biggest mill in Lancashire. In 1799, with a shrewdness worthy of the enterprise culture, he married Dale's daughter and bought the mills. He stayed for 25 years, built a school, the first co-op grocery, a laundry, a vegetable market and houses better than any workers' homes in Scotland. He paid higher wages for shorter hours than any other manufacturer, and still took enough in profit to go off and found the Cooperative Community of New Harmony in the USA.

Owen claimed that New Lanark had become "a self-employing, self-supporting, self-educating, and self-governing population". What the workers thought about it we don't know, but last week Jim Arnold stressed that New Lanark, with its 150 residents, is today "far more democratic than in Owen's day".

He's the manager (the same title that Owen used) of the New Lanark Conservation Trust, the body set up in 1974 to unite interests and apply for grant aid. To me, going back there, the changes are staggering. Much of the housing has been restored and occupied through grants, and enough work has been done to make one of the mills function as a visitors' centre, with the Scottish Wildlife Trust running the Falls of Clyde Nature Reserve. In an area with over 20 per cent unemployment, there are 240 people employed with MSC money.

With all the usual reservations about the Heritage industry, I could not but admire the sheer organisational zest with which the transformation has been accomplished. I was there for an International Conference on Utopian Thought and Communal Experience organised by Israeli kibbutzniks on the one hand and American academics on the other, with some direct descendants of Dale and Owen for sentimental reasons and accounts of current alternative communities for relevance.

The communitarian urge persists, despite every discouragement. Ron Roberts of Northern Iowa, for example, presented a paper on *Lumpen communards: recent attempts at community by the homeless in the US*, and resisted the tendency to measure the success or failure of any such venture by its longevity. Krishan Kumar of Kent University provided a thought for the week. "No organisations should last long," he declared. "They all begin to ossify from the moment they are set up."

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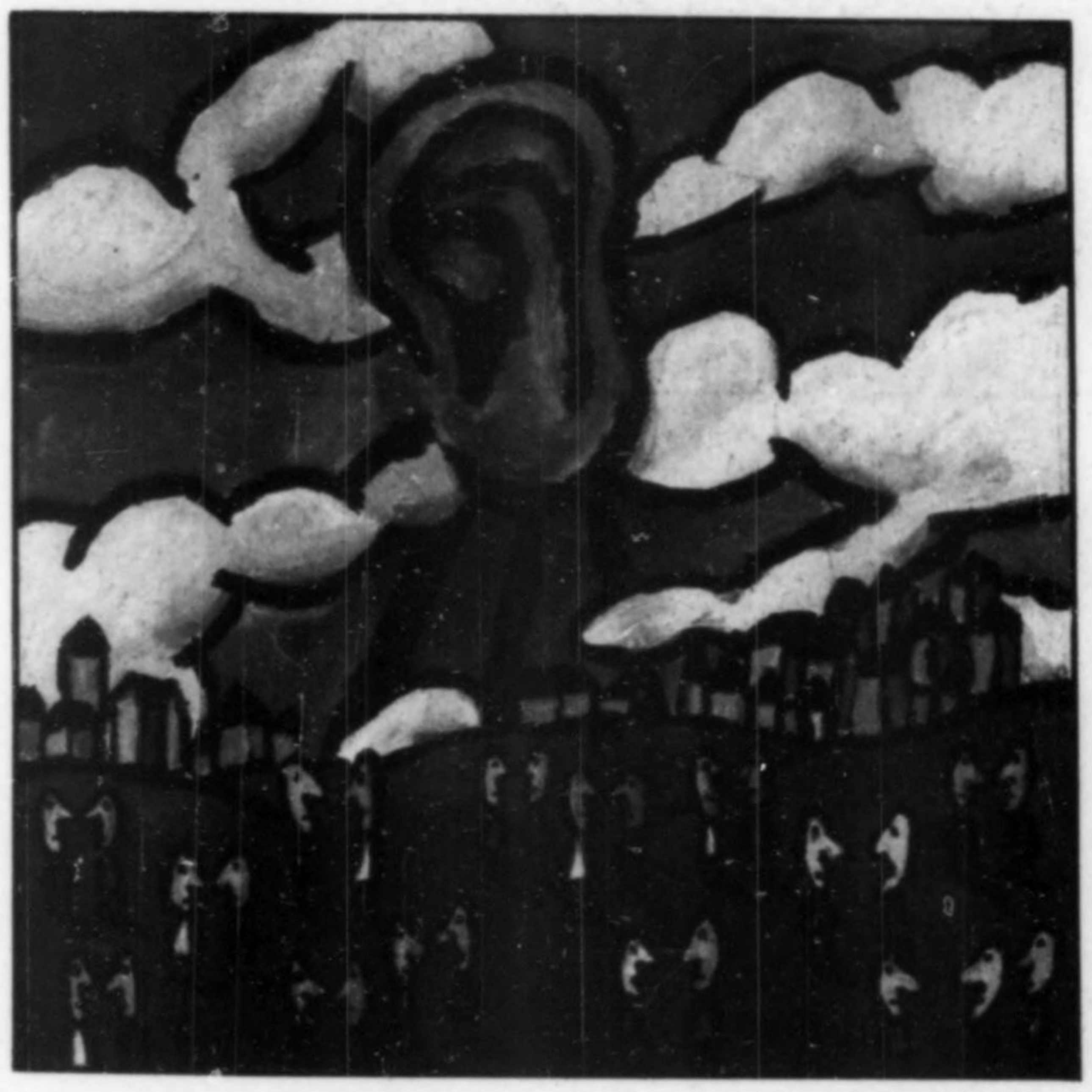
Somebody's listening



...and they don't give a damn about personal privacy or commercial confidence. Project 415 is a top-secret new global surveillance system. It can tap into a billion calls a year in the UK alone. Inside Duncan Campbell on how spying entered the 21st century...

Cocaine capitalism and the rise of the new narco rich

TV as tourism: the Granada Studios tour

Stuart Hood: the return of nationalism

NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY

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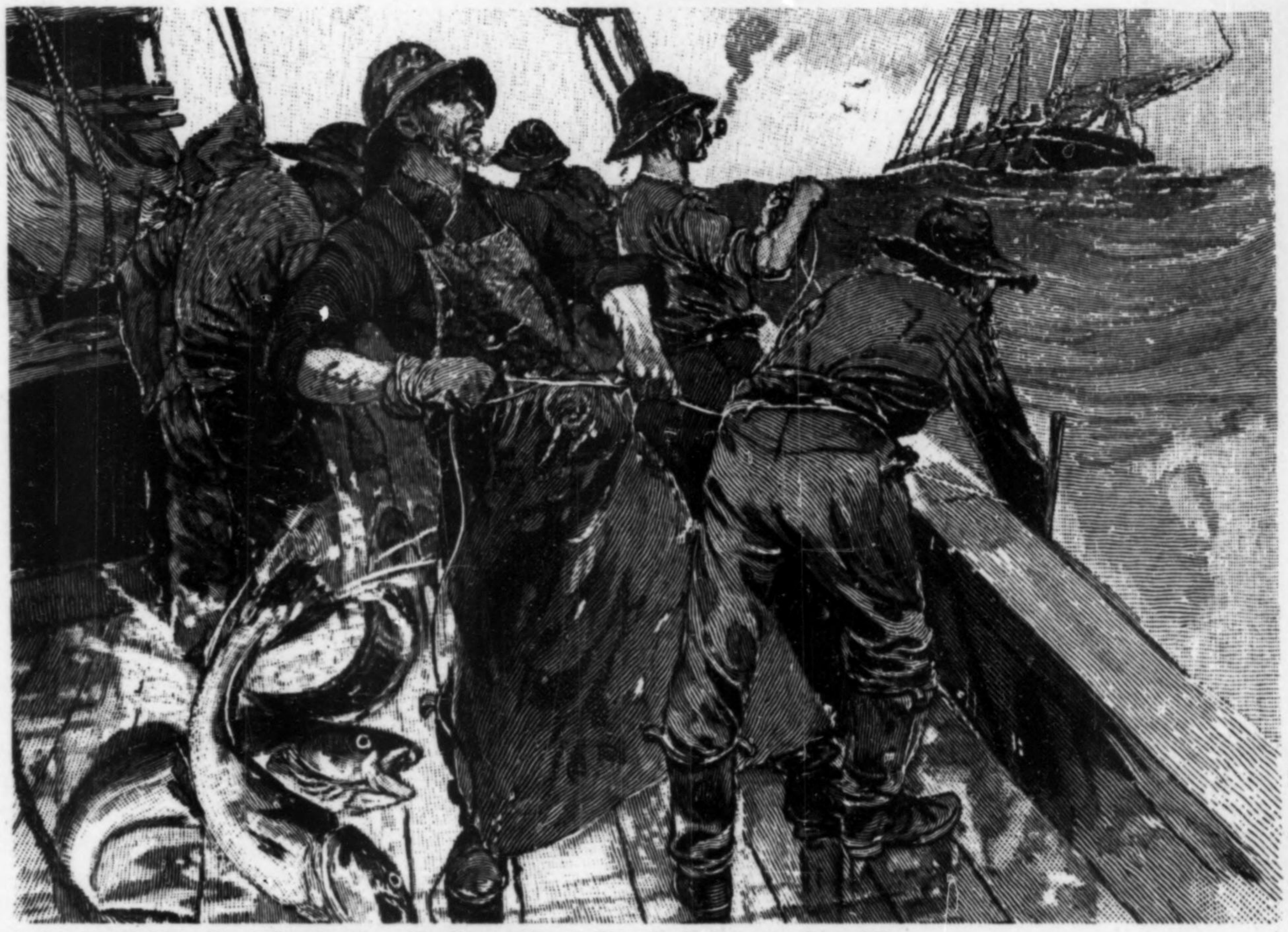
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THE DIGGER

Fun and games in the garden beats serious singing any day, says Stuart Weir

Is my incompetence in the garden for real or just a game? asks reader Daphne Dennison. Well, it's a bit of both, really, though I'd prefer to describe it as inexperience. There are loads of things which are supposed to be fun, games even, like singing, painting, swimming, tennis, which we learn at school either to do very well or not at all. Well, I'm all for performing very badly at singing, swimming, badminton, gardening, table football and Snakes and Ladders, and thoroughly enjoying it for its own sake. But I do get an extra frisson from freeing myself from the authoritarian demands of expertise and excellence.

Anyway, as we know well here, perseverance works. When I first took up gardening, I was entirely ignorant. I lived then in the Balls Pond Road, a grimy thoroughfare in Hackney, and had a "front area", a rough concrete patch a few yards square, instead of a garden in front of the house. Then the gentry moved in, removed the mess of cartons, newspapers, crisps bags, etc, from their front areas and began to cultivate them.

The new gardens looked jolly nice and I decided to join in. An architect down the road, pleased at this interest among the natives, encouraged me with advice. So I took a week off work, hired a pneumatic drill, and broke up the concrete crust and hardcore below. I also practically shook myself to bits and ruined my ears. Still, the architect popped down the road with large glasses of whisky and told me the way to calculate how much topsoil to order.

A lorry arrived at 7am on Saturday morning, and before I had time to get my socks on, had reversed up over the pavement and pitched a small mountain on top of my hole. What to do? I climbed the mountain and stuck a notice on top: "FREE TOPSOIL: TAKE AS MUCH AS YOU WANT". That morning the only evident sign of interest came from a small man who kept running backwards and forwards with a smaller pail. But then people arrived with dustbins and hired vans, and within two days, the mountain was reduced to the level of the retaining wall I'd built. (That's another story.)

"Um," said the architect, "this soil isn't too good. You'd better put some manure on this. I can get you some." Well, thanks I said, and he was as good as his word. A few weeks later the earth was covered in a smelly mess of straw and manure. Even amid the heady mix of diesel and take-home Chinese, the smell made its presence felt. But nature was of course quietly working its wonders and next spring, just as I was contemplating my planting policy ("lots of shrubs, Stuart," the architect advised) I woke up to discover that I had a cornfield in my front area.

I can't tell you how pleased and astonished the local people were. I can still remember standing in my front window and watching people stop, stare and burst into incredulous laughter. One man took an ear of corn between his fingers, gently broke it, and showed it to his wife. "Bloody amazing, innit?" he said, "Corn in the Balls Pond Road."

The EEC turned down my application for subsidy so I abandoned the cornfield at the end of the summer and—here's the moral of this tale—really got into planting shrubs and bulbs to provide flowers more or less continuously, and a tasty mix of foliage for the winter.

I checked it out the other day. There was just one surprise. I planted a delicate shrub with pale yellow-green leaves. It's either gone mad or it's a tree. It now stands at least 20 feet high and is quite the most inspired touch in the garden.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward is alarmed as the City of London spreads over Spitalfields

My friend Bobby has for 25 years had his little office in Commercial Street, London E1. Nowadays he's besieged with phone calls making offers for the premises.

Bobby is always polite. He listens to the smart young speculators, gratefully accepts their offers, and just when they propose to come round with the papers, explains that he doesn't actually own the place. Receiver crashes down at the other end. I keep telling him that he's going to be bought out, squeezed out or otherwise eased out, but he goes on believing in his gentleman's agreement with the landlord, forgetting that there aren't any gentle men in the property business.

I went the other night to an exhibition called "A Farewell to Spitalfields". It was rushed together by John Shaw and Ralph Samuel of Ruskin College, from old and new photographs and testimony, to remind us of the implications of the coming closure of Spitalfields market, and its removal eastward to Temple Mills.

It's moving, not because of traffic congestion or under-use, but because the annual turnover of the fruit and veg wholesalers is worth less than the "million square feet of potential office development right next door to the City of London" which will replace it.

This ancient area outside the city wall has been a market since the 14th century and a centre for the rag trade since the 15th. It is in the geographers' terms, the classic zone of transition where, as everyone knows, the Huguenots, then the Irish, then the Jews and now the Bengalis, have gained their first toehold in the urban economy.

It has always been a place of unlicensed factories in upper rooms, child labour, sweatshops, family solidarity and racial antagonism from outside. It has also been the hugely productive centre where the latest modes are run up for the smartest shops. And of course it houses the Petticoat Lane market, known 400 years ago as Rag Fair, and the market for birds and animals, Club Row. People have been thankful to get into it and glad to get out.

The same streets have always contained dozens of minute businesses supplying or applying the buttons, zips, fixings and trimmings or pressing, pinning and packaging for the wholesale market. What you wear either comes from a chain of subcontractors in places like Spitalfields or from their equivalents in South East Asia.

If you don't like it you should make your own clothes. What you *shouldn't* do is to applaud the elimination of the low-rent workshop economy by the high-rent finance industry that doesn't deal with useful commodities at all, just in money.

The organisers of that little exhibition at the Bishopsgate Institute were right to say that, "The viewer is thus confronted with two versions of the enterprise culture: one of family business and small scale firms, the other of international high finance with computer screens linking the City of London to the money markets of the world."

The left, when in office, used a lot of energy in attempting to eliminate the zone of transition, which represented everything it despised about petty capitalism. The right carelessly wipes it out because low-income enterprises are automatically absurd when property as such is a much better investment. Politically neither side recognises the need for the scruffy, busy workshop economy which depends on cheap premises close to the market.

"The whole industrial economy of Spitalfields," Shaw and Samuel claim, "rests on cheap workrooms: rentals in the new office complex are some eight times greater than they are in the purlieus of Brick Lane, and with the dizzy rise in property values which will flow, accommodation of all kinds, whether for working space or home, will be beyond local people." But who cares?

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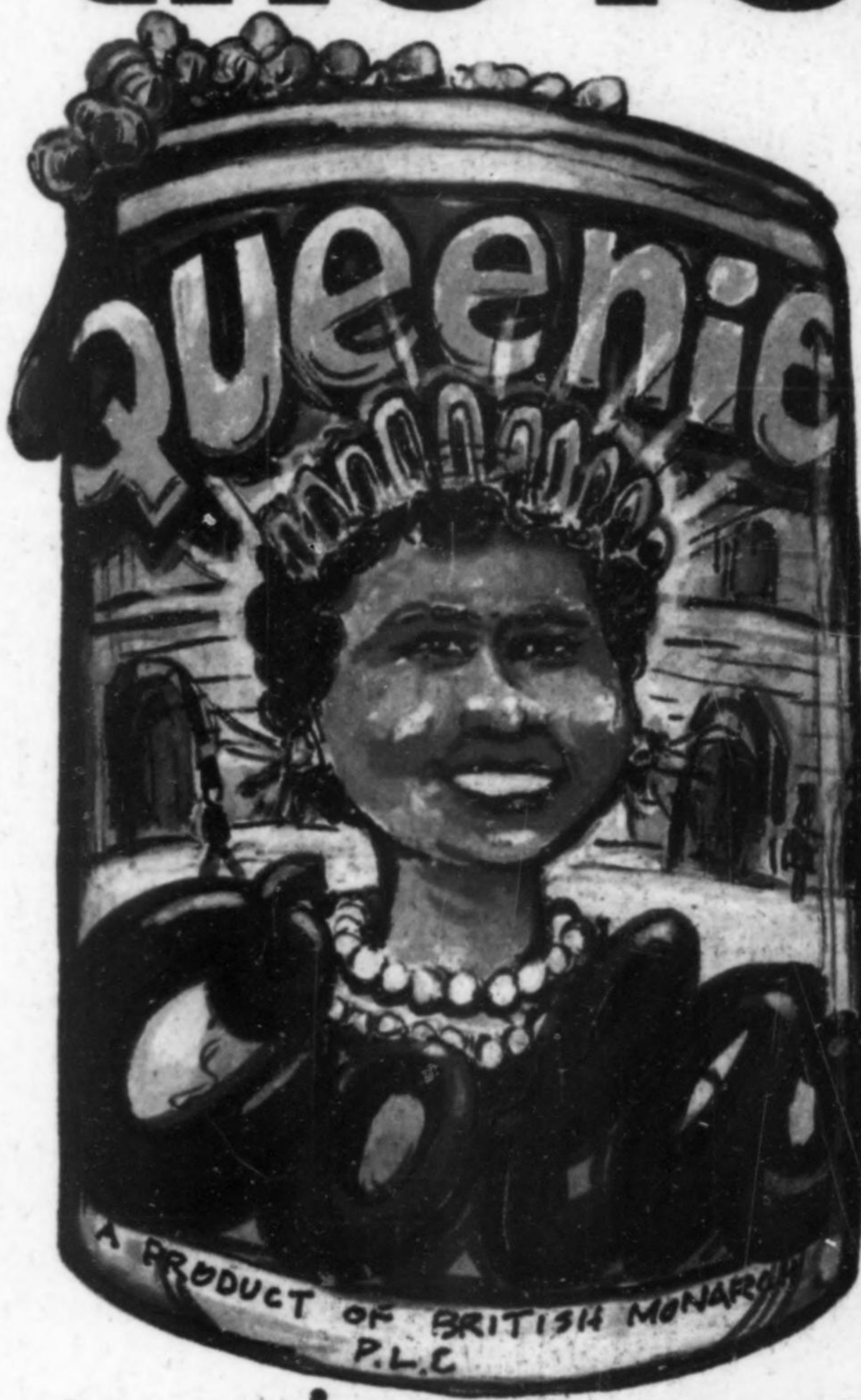
Sell off the royals



Queenie
A PRODUCT OF BRITISH MONARCH
P.L.C

The new big-money leisure industry has finally got a piece of the monarchy. Britain's first private-sector tourist attraction exclusively devoted to all things royal has just opened up for business... Can full-scale privatisation be far off?

Alexander Cockburn: making a man of Bush

Euro-holler: Norman Willis changes his mind

Why the NCCL isn't doing its job

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THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman says it's a good summer for vegetables—if you know 100 recipes for marrows

At the allotments they know I'm a journalist and they like to put trick questions. Last week a couple of fellow toilers asked: "Have you seen the front page of the paper?"

They didn't say which paper so I had to work it out. I eliminated "Tory vice queen in hospital Aids dash" (*News of the World*), "Barby gets the sack" (*Sunday Mirror*) and "Body-Snatchers savaged my husband" (*Sunday Sport*). Disregarding the heavies, that left "Danger alert on exploding sprays" (*Sunday Express*) and "Sunny for months" (*The People*).

I thought the first unlikely because I don't use aerosols on the plot (he wrote, in a vain bid to restore his credit with the environmental lobby). So it had to be the weather. The story said the hot, sunny spell would last well into September. The sources were a trio of amateur meteorologists, but that didn't weaken the tale because we gardeners rely heavily on folk wisdom.

"Marvellous news," I cried, but I immediately recognised that this was too upbeat a response. I lack the essential pessimism to be a true cultivator: Olga tells me that my propensity for looking on the bright side makes Mary Poppins look like Jeremiah.

"It means we'll have to be watering," said my informant gloomily. I didn't remind him that only two weeks earlier he was complaining that the ground was so wet it was impossible to work.

In fact, I and my neighbours have very little to moan about when it comes to water. The allotments are owned by the water authority and nearly every plot has its own tap. Privatisation is a more realistic threat than drought.

The only drawback is the time it takes to do the watering. I don't often visit the plot more than once a week (it's a ten-minute drive from my house) but I try to fit in an extra trip during dry spells to hose it down. I have one of those very useful devices that you can stick in the ground, and leave it to spray a radius of about four yards while you're working on another area.

Some of my neighbours get the hose out if we haven't had any rain for 24 hours, apparently feeling it's important for the ground to be moist all the time. I'm sure that's unnecessary. Vegetables are more resilient, and the ground slower to dry out, than they think. Even after that very hot week, the soil still felt distinctly damp only a couple of inches from the surface.

So far it's been an ideal summer for veg (Mary Poppins again). A wet July and a warm August are just what most of them need. My prize crop so far are some scallop-shaped squash (marrow) that I grew for the first time this year instead of courgettes.

I usually have poor luck with courgettes—after the first couple of pickings they acquire a wasting disease and perish. These squash show no signs of doing that so far. They are extraordinarily prolific and an aesthetically pleasing shape. I pick them when they are about four inches in diameter, as recommended on the packet; but the problem is how to cook them.

Steaming them like marrows is a bit boring and if you fry them like courgettes you lose the benefit of the scalloped shape, which is part of the point. Olga has tried stuffing them with minced meat, and with cheese and tomato, and baking them. That's fine but there are still a lot left and I could do with some other suggestions.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward goes to pubs—not for the drink, or the food, but for the music

Maybe the best thing that has happend to the licensed trade is the fact that publicans can't make a living any more simply by selling booze. They have to have some other attractions to draw the punters in.

Most have moved into food, and it's my experience that you get far better value for money in a pub than in a restaurant, but increasingly it is live music that boosts trade. Musak, happily, drives them out after a while. Urban pubs develop their own specialities: jazz, blues, rock, Irish ballads, sixties music, reggae, someone playing sing-along oldies, or country-and-western groups.

In rural England it is all much less standardised. A local following tags on to a favourite performer whose reputation grows through word of mouth.

At one end of Suffolk there's the Butley Oyster. It is incredibly crowded on folk nights, all the tables are pushed together to make a kind of board meeting where you sit around and catch the chairman's eye if you want to do your act. There's "authentic" unaccompanied folk, pseudo-folk and neo-folk, and Edwardian music-hall ballads. It's cosmopolitan: last time we went there were Dutch and Yiddish songs.

It's a privilege to perform, and to get a drink you have to squeeze out of the back door to the other bar and bring it in. The ordinary hubbub of conversation tends to be loud and often impolite.

At our end of the county people know who is performing where, and arrange their weekend evenings accordingly. Most loved are those musicians of professional quality who use their very expertise to encourage anyone who turns up to do their piece. The real musicians will play along with all, whether it's my neighbour Alan doing his WW2 numbers on his harmonica, or Dennis Pym, persuaded to give his rendering of *Click go the shears*.

I love to watch the way they pick up the key and the tempo to encourage the singer in songs they may never have heard before. They abolish the distinction between skilled and incompetent, young and old, professional and unprofessional.

Last weekend, for example, we heard that the Churchfitters would be at the King's Head, Bildeston, and got ourselves seats in the corner. They're a duo, based in Colchester, and they don't travel far, unless it's really far, like Thailand or Australia. Anthony is tall, dark and Irish, Rosie is slight and blond.

Between them they have every kind of fretted instrument: guitars, mandolins, banjos, several things to blow, from twin whistles to a soprano saxophone, and all sorts of percussive sound: tamborine, drums, bones, spoons and a cardboard box operated by a drummer's pedal. They use mikes and an amplifier, so they aren't worried by the general noise level of the pub.

Supremely competent, they have worked up a huge repertoire: British and Irish folksongs, American songs, Appalachian fiddle music and East European dances. In a mobile and eclectic world, they aren't a bit concerned about the distinction that used to split Cecil Sharp House apart, between "genuine" folk traditions and everyone's experience of listening to modern recordings. As Louis Armstrong used to remark, "It's all folk music. Ain't never heard a horse sing."

Sometimes these two streams actually meet. A lady in her seventies who plays the phono-fiddle, an instrument like a violin without any body but with a big metallic horn at the bottom, which sounds, people say, like an old 78-rpm record, was cajoled to come, from her home near Thetford to play at Rougham.

Among the other performers was an itinerant piano-accordionist, and one of his numbers was a well known Irish dance tune. The phono-fiddler beckoned him over to her honoured place by the fireside.

"Do you know what you were playing?" she asked. "Sure," he replied, "It's called Dennis Murphy's Polka."

"Dennis Murphy was my brother," she said.

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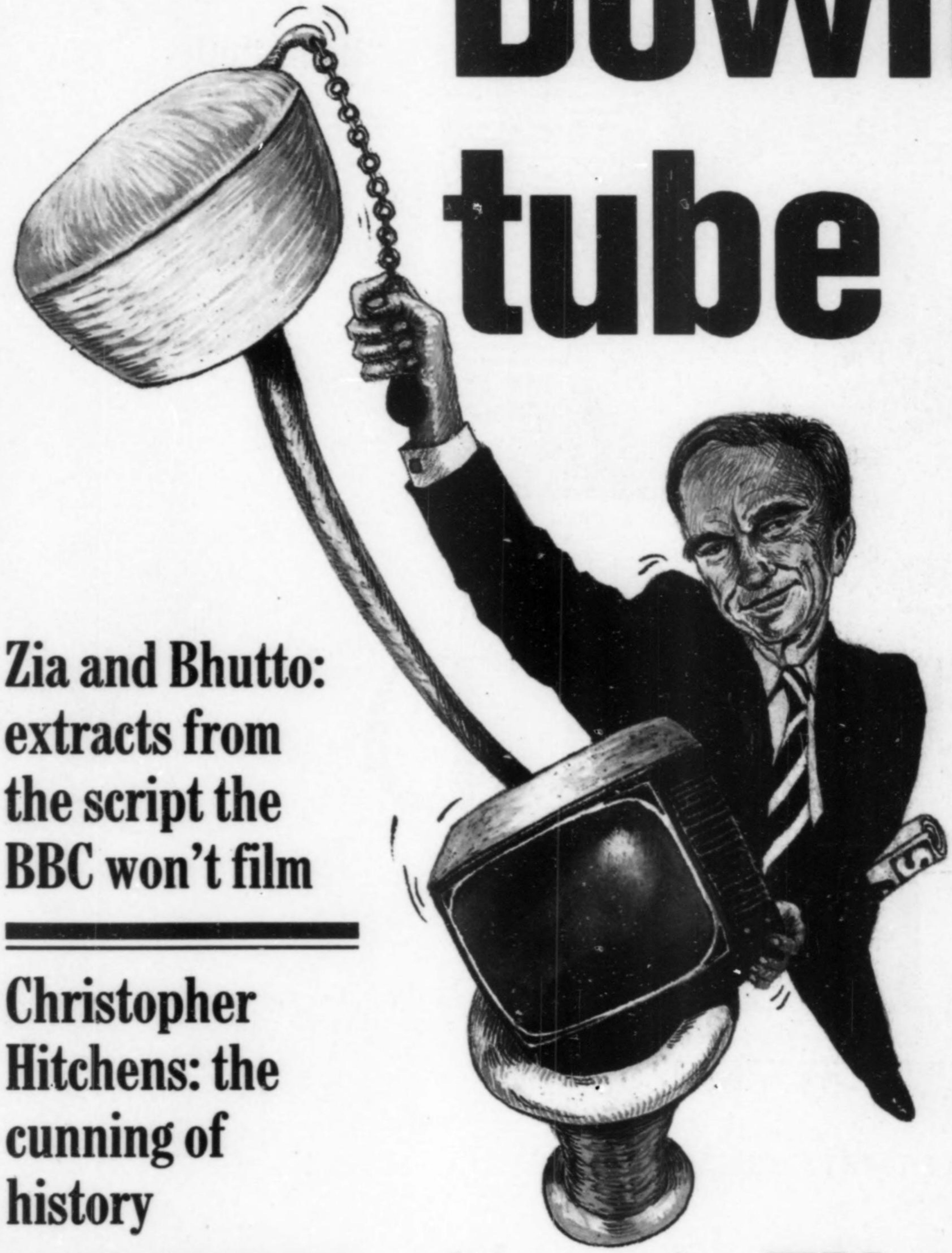
Down the tube



It's too late to adjust your set. The age of Mogg and Murdoch is upon us. The government may have brought TV to heel. But it's the international media barons who are really in control...

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Christopher Hitchens: the cunning of history

Duncan Campbell: the Cabinet secrets the BBC won't show

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THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman, an unusually optimistic gardener, plans to extend the possible

A few weeks ago I wrote here of the dangers of midsummer sowing, pointing out that, despite what it says on the packet, it is often too hot and dry for the seeds to flourish. That pearl of cautionary wisdom immediately preceded the wettest July for ages, which would have been ideal for starting late crops: but by then I had taken my own advice and gone on holdiay, leaving the seed bed empty.

In consequence we are now consuming the last of the summer lettuce (good title for a TV series?), sown in April. But August is the time to sow things for the winter, so last week I put in some seeds of a winter lettuce that we should be able to start harvesting in November.

In fact, though, they may not come up at all because I made a mistake when buying them and discovered on reading the packet that the variety, Marmer, is supposed to be grown in a cold frame or a cool greenhouse. But having bought them I thought I would try them outdoors anyway, testing my theory that Brixton is the most temperate part of the country. The bed is on the eastern side of a wooden fence that protects it from the prevailing wind, and by November it isn't *that* cold. It is only by experimenting that you learn what can be done, as Chairman Mao probably used to say.

Organic gardeners will be glad to learn that before planting I laced the bed liberally with material from what I laughingly call my compost heap. I have never been methodical enough to do compost properly, by which I mean compressing organic matter neatly into a container and extracting it through a slit at the bottom. I just stack up the weeds and cabbage leaves in a heap at one end of the plot, keeping it to a manageable size by having an occasional bonfire. Over the years the base of the heap has broken down into serviceable-looking compost, and the fires have ensured that it is rich in potash.

The only weed that refuses to blend with the rest is couch grass. This is a tough pest—I've even had it growing right through potatoes, in one end and out the other. Despite years of patient digging, I have never been able to eradicate it from one section of the allotment. The brilliant white roots persist long after all the other weeds in the compost heap have turned to dust. At least their colour makes them easy to identify and remove. If I let couch grass run rampant in the seed bed I wouldn't give much for the lettuce's chances.

Other crops I put into the bed at the same time were spring cabbage and winter radish. The cabbage is usually a good standby at a season when not much else is available, although last year it failed totally. Winter radishes, like their summer cousins, neer fail, as long as you give them enough water. They come in white or red varieties, and they will happily stand in the chilly soil for weeks, waiting until you are ready to pick them. I find the white get a bit stringy sometimes so I prefer the red. The variety I grow is China Rose, large and deeply coloured with a ferocious flavour.

While browsing through my half-empty seed packets I noticed that the turnips I sowed in the spring could be started as late as August, so I decided to test the claim. I enjoy fresh turnips as much as any root vegetable but this year the crop from the main April sowing was very disappointing; most of them ran to seed and scarcely any of the others reached more than an inch in diameter. Maybe they'll do better with a late start. Gardening is about taking chances, trying to extend the bounds of the possible.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward takes cross-country journeys and regrets British Rail's failure to explain its operations

Like any reasonable person I'm a railway enthusiast. Not in that tedious ever-so-English nostalgic way, but because the train is the most rational, safest and most convivial form of mass transportation. But between us and British Rail, which we own, there's such a barrage of professional public relations people that if ever I actually meet any of the BR high-ups I harangue them like any outraged commuter.

It happened last month. I buttonholed this nice guy with my complaints about the way the convolutions of fares policy always penalised the journey I wanted to make. He took it all with good humour and then asked, "Do you seriously think there's someone in an office in London calculating how to lure you with-concessions which turn out not to apply to your journeys?"

"Yes," I replied, "that's just what I do think." He patiently explained that the government had laid a duty on BR to fill every train and that manipulating prices was the only known way of achieving this.

Well, every train I travel on seems to be pretty full, if not overflowing. But this very fact raises huge issues. You can see the nature of any nation state by looking at its railway links. A wise Swiss, Herbert Luethy once advised us to examine his country's railway system, the densest network in the world, which faithfully reflected the local and federal democracy of that country. "At great cost and with great trouble, it has been made to serve the needs of the smallest localities and most remote valleys, not as a paying proposition, but because it was the will of the people."

A "democratic railway movement" in the 19th century ensured that industry was distributed all over Switzerland, and Luethy compared this with the French system, entirely centred on Paris "so that the prosperity or the decline, the life or death, of whole regions has depended on the quality of the link with the capital."

Britain is nowadays much like France. All lines lead to London. Time and again I have sought to make a cross-country journey only to find that it was simpler and faster to go to London, enduring the change between one terminus and another, rather than have endless waits on platforms in attempting a direct route. One problem of comparison is that today's seating and rolling-stock for the inter-city trade are incomparably better than the older coaches relegated to minor routes.

I took a couple of trips the other day which tested BR's provision for the non-metropolitan. I went from Newton Abbot to Manchester by way of Birmingham and on the following day from Manchester to Ipswich on a magical cross-section of our industrial history.

Naturally I had to stand through the most exciting slice of the journey, between Manchester and Sheffield, and needless to say, the catering, a trolley provided by Rightline, "a private company independent of BR", couldn't penetrate the overcrowded aisles. But what an incredible route it was, taking in Chesterfield, Derby, Nottingham and Peterborough, and absorbing the backside of modern Britain, just as the previous day's trip between Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Stoke-on-Trent had done.

Not for the first time, I reflected that the problem is that our various leaders travel Inter-City and miss the provincial routes, or that, more likely, they go by plane or along motorways landscaped through green fields. They never have even the vicarious passing visual contact that the train provides with the ruined and empty lineside environment.

What I yearned for was a guide, which was taken for granted a century ago, to the sights from the train window. Ten years ago David Wright, a teacher-trainer at the University of East Anglia, produced an *East Anglican Railpack* to enhance school journeys, for British Rail Norwich Division. But the Norwich Division was shut down in the interests of commercial viability and the packs just got lost.

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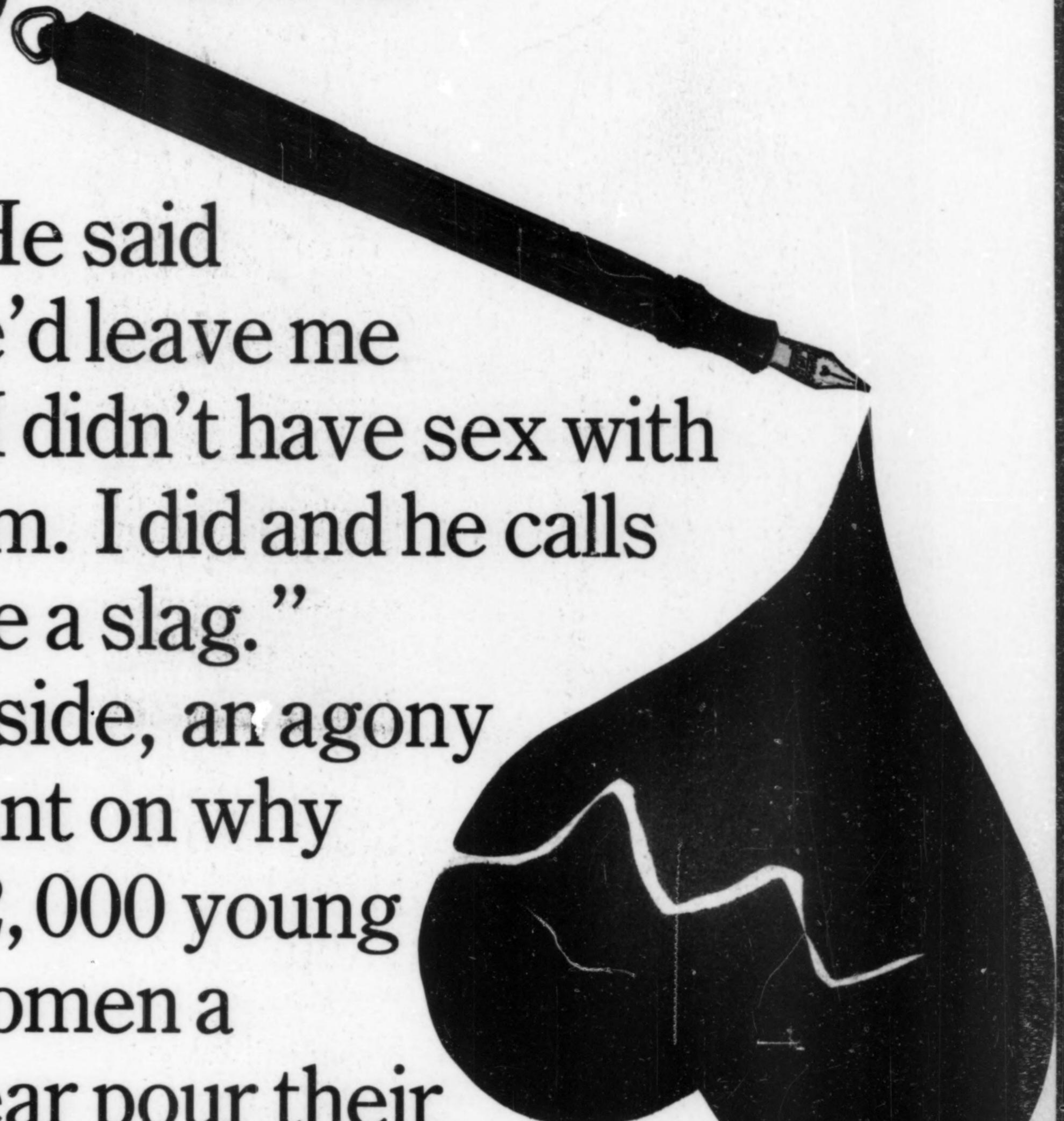

“He said he’d leave me if I didn’t have sex with him. I did and he calls me a slag.” Inside, an agony aunt on why 12,000 young women a year pour their hearts out to her

United they fall: why unions lose jobs

Hanif Kureishi: Saatchi and Thatcher

Whatever happened to British philosophy?

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Cover: Tony Garrett

THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman characteristically looks forward to a satisfying September

September is one of the most satisfying months on the allotment but also one of the most strenuous. Because I grow a second early variety of potato, now is the time to dig them up and cart them home. Growers of maincrop varieties usually wait until October.

Every year I am surprised how quickly the potatoes stalks die down. One week they are a healthy shade of green, swaying in the wind; next week they are yellow and decaying, and a week after that they have virtually disappeared. This makes digging them hazardous, because it is hard to locate the stems. I have never discovered a way of avoiding spiking some—usually the biggest—with the fork.

The first diggings suggest that the yield will be satisfactory but will not match last year's bumper crop. I planted them in a rectangular block this time—not for any scientific reason, but because that happened to be the shape of the available patch. One corner has encouraged large, baking-sized spuds, but they get smaller as you move across. The better end is right at the edge of the allotment. It had not been used for serious cultivation for a year or two, which seems to support theories about crop rotation.

I had a trial dig of parsnips last week: much too early according to the books but they seemed to be of a fair size already and I thought I'd experiment. They are blander at this time of year than in the winter, the recommended digging season. I don't use the vaunted crowbar method, by which you make a deep hole with a crowbar, fill it with loose soil and plant the seed in that, ensuring straight growth. One reason I don't is that the allotment is just beyond the walls of Brixton Prison, and if the police ever raid my shed a crowbar could be hard to explain away. The other reason is that I rather enjoy the weird shapes into which the uncrowbarred roots get contorted. My ambition is to grow one suggestive enough to send to Esther Rantzen for *That's Life*.

At least the parsnips gave us a gastronomic break from the scallop-shaped squash I wrote about a couple of weeks ago—now more prolific than ever—and from the climbing French bean. When I last mentioned these I noted the poor germination and was worried whether my rickety support structure would survive high winds. It's OK so far and even with comparatively few plants we've been overwhelmed and are eating our way doggedly through them. They have a subtler flavour than the dwarf runners alongside, which have yielded less spectacularly, but I think will show greater staying power. The French beans seem virtually finished now, but the runners are still producing their bright red flowers and will be in production for a few weeks yet.

My red and white cabbages are the size of footballs and the sprouts and cauliflower look promising. They have all been less plagued this year with whitefly, an irritating scourge. On BBC2's *Gardeners' World* the other day a Welsh allotment-holder blithely told us that whitefly do the crops no harm. This may be true but they are dreadfully unsightly. Some take the same cavalier attitude towards weeds but gardening, especially in a semi-public plot, is about appearances as much as results. I'm surprised the BBC encourages such sloppiness. I hope Sir William Rees-Mogg's new Broadcasting Standards Council will be empowered to curb anarchic, horticultural tendencies at a time when children are still watching.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward laments that community initiatives are to be replaced by the community charge

One of my very few inventions was the phrase "the community workshop" in *Anarchy*, August 1963. So a quarter of a century later I always feel a glow of pleasure when I hear of a successful venture under that name. And consequently a spasm of pain to learn that Norwich community workshop faces closure this month because of yet another sudden change in the government's unemployment strategy.

The community programme, already notoriously inflexible and short-term in its support for local initiatives, is to be abandoned as yet another scheme, the adult training programme is introduced.

Now I don't claim to be more far-sighted than anyone else, but in April 1972 I published in the *Bulletin of Environmental Education* a really important paper by John Ewen, then of the National Youth Bureau, initiating the idea of a community industry. He stressed that it was not to be confused with expedients to keep the young occupied with notions of voluntary community service, still less with those about conscript community service.

It was to be a recognition that unemployment was a permanent aspect of post-industrial Britain. Ewen envisaged a whole new industry of community maintenance which would pay appropriate rates and in which a career structure would emerge, operating in environmental improvement, housing renewal, social and health services.

Vocational training was to be an integral part, but he reminded us that the prolongation of schooling would only be useful if the most radical changes took place in the attitude of schools and colleges to the group he had in mind, since its motivation was "almost diametrically opposed to ongoing formal education".

Well, the community industry was initiated, but to the bitter disappointment of John Ewen, as a short-term stop-gap. It actually gave birth to the Manpower Services Commission, which grew and grew and swallowed up its parent and a lot else beside, begetting all those schemes with bewildering initials that subsidise some of the jobless young in employment, or give them a motive to get up in the morning, with the usual endless arguments about made work or cheap labour.

Ordinary parents and teachers, let alone the young, get lost in an ever changing series of initials (remember YOPS and TOPS?), and must even get used to the idea that the MSC itself is to re-emerge as the Training Commission. I'm not a conspiracy-theorist. I've met people who have benefitted greatly from MSC-funded initiatives. But I can't help feeling that the endless shifts destroy accountability, continuity and any attempt at evaluation.

At one level nameless people whisper in the ear of an unelected minister in the House of Lords, and policy changes. At another, unofficial bodies with useful social aims, use up their energies and resources, and even change their policies, so as to be eligible for job-creating support, only to discover that the rules have changed and another set of boots have to be licked. At yet another there are local authorities charged with providing a service to the community who find themselves arraigned for over-spending, while new money from central government is provided to meet the same need, through initiatives that can be switched on or off by guidelines which you and I don't understand.

But beyond all this, people like me, and I am sure, John Ewen, who are not politicians, nor academics, nor civil servants, have a nasty, niggling feeling that we should have been able to read the writing on the wall, generations ago. Could our mistake have been that it was automatic for us to make use of that loaded word "community"?

The community workshop, the community industry and the community programme are to be expunged. What you will be left with is the community charge.

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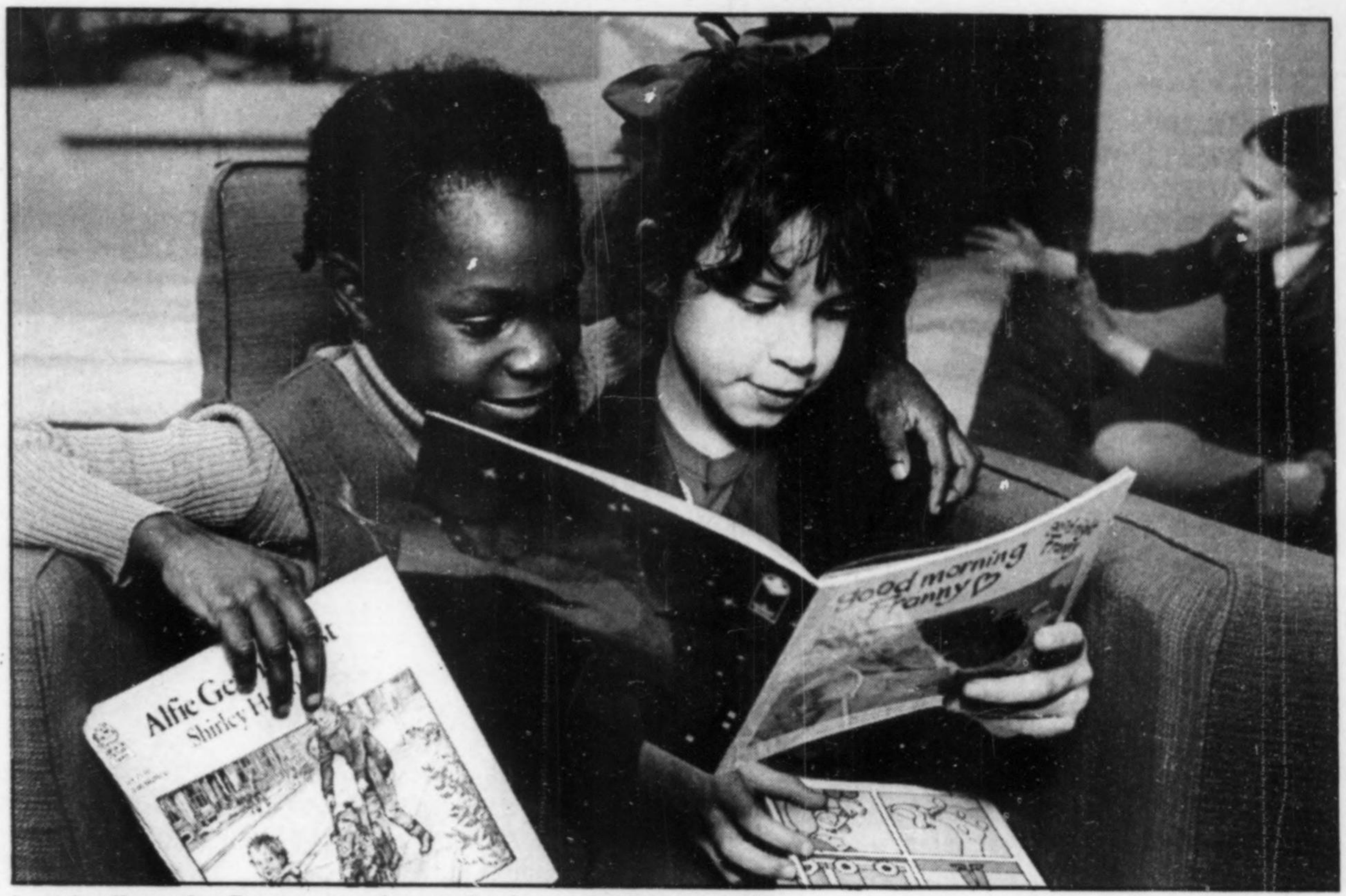
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THE DIGGER

Stuart Weir describes the last round-up of a weedy front lawn

Our front lawn was never exactly prepossessing: an unkempt and bumpy apron of straw-coloured grass. Five years of neglect transformed it into a living lexicon of Britain's common weeds, but when they moved in on the shrubbery—the last oasis of cultivation—I decided enough was enough. We'd returf it. But how to eradicate the weeds?

"Round-Up!" exclaimed Pam and Maria in unison. This may invoke visions of lassooing the weeds, but in fact it represented temptation. Round Up is a chemical weedkiller. But not one which contaminates the ground or puts animals at risk, they reassured me. "We use it all the time," they added. (Pam and Maria are professional gardeners with a decided green tinge.)

I must admit that I wanted to be reassured. Digging out the weeds looked like being a sisyphean task. So I capitulated at once, but then as the weed-choked patch yellowed over the next three weeks, I worried like mad over the welfare of the worms underneath (though rather less over that of the Doberman which insists on pissing on it).

"You can easily dig that over this weekend," said Liz. I wasn't so sure. "Rotivate it!", said Maria. That sounded more like it; though I'd never actually seen a rotivator, I was aware that it was a sort of mechanised plough for domestic use. "Rotivate it?" said Liz's mum. "You could dig that little patch over in an hour."

In a spirit of modernity, I decided on the rotivator. I felt rather less sure when I discovered that it had a petrol motor. I've several times been humiliated by my inability to get them to start, and Liz was to be away the day the thing came.

As it happened, I easily got it to go. But making it work was quite another matter. A rotivator is a bit like a lawnmower with sharp blades for turning the soil. But my glutinous grey London clay glued them into immobility. The wretched thing could do no more than scrape the surface.

"Did he show you how to gate it?" asked Maria. "Gate it? How do you do that?" "I don't know, I wish I'd watched more carefully." At which point, Maria took herself off to a wedding.

There was nothing for it. I left the rotivator ingloriously stranded in the middle of the lawn and began to dig it over with a garden fork, picking out astonishing quantities of Victorian builders' rubble, stones and even coal. No buried treasure. I also renewed a boyhood acquaintance with a pleasing abundance of worms.

It was an exceedingly tiresome task. The palms of my hands blistered and I wore through the skin inside my thumbs. But with the words of Liz's mum ringing in my ears, I stoically pulled on Liz's gardening gloves and carried on. Not counting stops for *Saint & Greavsie*, Lean Cuisine lasagne for lunch and walking the dog, it took me two hours.

By this time Pam and Maria were back from the wedding and in high spirit. They advised rotivating the dug-over ground to make the soil, in Maria's words, more friable. I began to do so, but the machine was deafeningly loud, awkward to move around, and very unpleasant to hold. I then noticed that it was chopping up the worms in its cruelly impersonal way and decided to abandon it. Back to the fork.

Finally it was done. The neighbours were pleasingly admiring. Pam danced over it on her heels, showing me how to even the surface out for turfing. But it's not a technique I'd recommend; it sends sharp pains ricocheting through your leg muscles. I'll hire a steamroller next weekend.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward picks up a pebble and finds grassroots initiatives

I carry round with me, like a particularly beautiful pebble picked up on the beach, a remark made 30 years ago by Richard Titmuss. Social ideas, he said, "may well be as important in Britain in the next half-century as technical innovation". Think about it. In the context of rented housing, for example, the left, then as now, believed in direct provision by local authorities. The right, then as now, thought it possible to revive private landlordism for low-income people.

A handful of social innovators reinvented co-operative housing from scratch, as a mode of tenure that by-passed the landlord-tenant syndrome and extended dweller control beyond the frontiers of owner-occupation. When Titmuss wrote there were two housing co-ops in Britain. Today there are hundreds and their significance goes far beyond their numbers.

This is why *New Society*'s "Initiatives" column was one of its most important features, and why it's a delight that this column continues in the present journal. We do have a crisis of social welfare which goes deeper than the effects of current government policies, and in a unitary state committed in theory at least to a uniform standard of provision, there is a special importance in little local initiatives that posit a different way of doing things.

A new book *Grassroots Initiatives* (Bedford Square Press £5.50) brings together 68 of these accounts from the last few years, covering women's issues, ethnic minorities, health, provision for the handicapped, education, housing, crime and the community, families and young people, employment and the arts. They are written by a handful of journalists whose names are very well known and trusted by you and me.

They're all level-headed people, but if I were, say, Amanda Mitchison or Steve Platt, I would be tempted to view the world with an incredible optimism, just through continually meeting these precious social innovators. As a matter of fact I do suffer from this temptation. Being on the sidelines of the housing world and the education world, I only meet the busy bees who thrust aside the ordinary daily discouragements and inertia and pursue what seems to them to be the next sensible step.

I just don't meet the discouraged functionaries behind the counter in the welfare delivery services of the centralised state and the demoralised local authorities. If I did I would feel much more sympathetic to the claims of NALGO, NUPE, COHSE, the CPSA and the POA. We've all delegated to them the dreary end of the public administration of welfare in a world where they are despised not only by their political masters but by the clients they are hired to serve.

Can you imagine a worse climate in which to discuss social innovations? David Lipsey in his introduction to the book states the issue correctly. He notes that Britain is the most centralised of all the major western democracies and that "the gloomy picture of Britain as a nation where all power lies at the centre, crushing energies which lie outside it, has a dismal ring of truth".

It's like Tsarist Russia in the 19th century. "We lack a countervailing tradition of corporate involvement in community affairs." Sometimes the initiatives come from "the much-derided local authorities", sometimes from people who have the know-how to grab the disappearing MSC cash or EEC funds not under Whitehall control, sometimes purely from local self-help depending on no outside support. Just like the early 19th century when Britain was not like Russia and when non-taxpayers taxed themselves to build up the whole edifice of building societies, voluntary hospitals, the co-operative movement, and much else, in those experimental days before the Fabians and marxists taught us that the state should be the universal provider and tax-gatherer.

If I was asked to nominate a book of the year for 1988 it would be *Grassroots Initiatives*.

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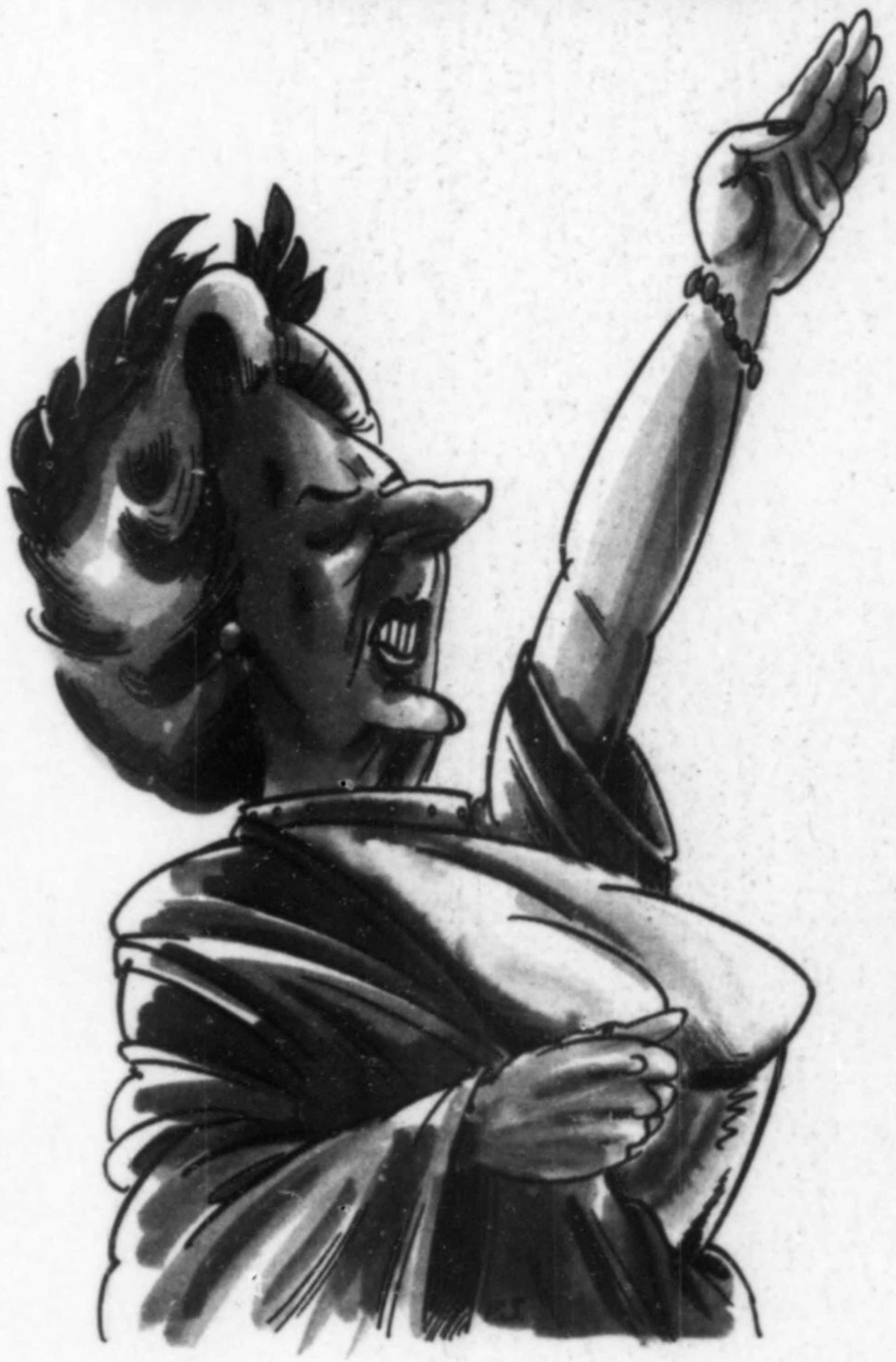
Send Her Victorious!



Britain's unfair voting system delivers strong and stable government: strong and stable *Tory* government. It's given Mrs Thatcher an unearned political dominance and monopoly control of state power. So why does Labour go along with it?

Hazhir Teimourian on the gassing of the Kurds

Francis Wheen: how to upset the Press Council

Suzanne Moore on missionary sex

NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY

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THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman on the ups and downs of a brassica

A neighbouring allotment-toiler came over to cast aspersions on my cauliflowers. Many have "blown"—in other words they are spreading themselves into little individual white-tipped shoots instead of the proper tightly-bunched curds.

"You should have bent the leaves over their crowns when they were small, to stop the sun getting at them," said the neighbour. I promptly did so with those that were not yet fully formed, to show that I valued his advice: but Olga shook her head and demurred.

"The trouble was you didn't plant them firmly enough," she ruled. "With brassica you have to be sure to pack the soil tightly round the roots."

Enough of this folk wisdom, I thought; what do the experts say? Leafing through my gardening books, I found that they hedge their bets and advise that this condition, which is common, can be caused by a number of factors—poor soil, not enough water or insect infestation, to name just three.

The soil was fairly well manured and the plants have had occasional doses of Growmore fertiliser, so it probably was not that. Lack of water seemed unlikely at first, given the rainy summer—but there was, I remember, a dry spell at the beginning of August, just as they were in a crucial stage of development. As for pests, the cauliflowers have attracted more whitefly than the rest of the brassicas. This, I suspect, is because they are a few rows away from the cabbages and sprouts, and I might have forgotten to spray them as regularly.

Of all the books, the most moving account of the cauliflowers' plight came from Fred Loads, that former stalwart of Radio 4's *Gardeners' Question Time*. In his 1949 work, *Vegetables in the Small Garden*, he wrote: "It should always be borne in mind that the primary object of every plant is to make seed for the reproduction of its kind, and as the curd of a cauliflower is the flower-bud, any check which makes the plant feel that it is going to die will induce the curd to run to seed prematurely, so producing the condition we know as 'bolting'."

What I have, then, are cauliflowers with intimation of mortality. It seems they need psychiatric rather than horticultural help.

While my neighbour has been sneering at my cauliflowers, I have been admiring his sweet corn. I have not tried to grow this for several years, having been discouraged by repeated past failures. I convinced myself that, even in temperate Brixton, the English summer is not really hot enough to grow corn successfully, despite claims by gardening writers that there are now varieties specially adapted to our intemperate climate. (As long ago as 1949, Loads was making the same claim, attributing the recent popularity of the plant to "our American allies' demand for this succulent dish".)

Still, my neighbour has produced three or four heads on each of his 15 plants, spaced five by three in a rectangular patch in order to help with their pollination. Since sweet corn is one of the vegetables that tastes spectacularly better when eaten hours rather than days after harvesting, I might give it another chance next year.

I must confess, though, that I was even unable to grow it in America. The hot, muggy New York summers are theoretically just what it needs but my crop there was ravaged by rats coming in from the East River. I like to think that the plants never saw them coming, that they expired painlessly and were not forced to brood on death like the morbid, overblown cauliflowers.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward on the shops for the poor that are too expensive for the rich

A special accolade is deserved by Radio 4's *Punters* feature, "the programme with listener power". It investigated the not at all obvious issue of Tesco's modest little supermarket in Goodge Street, London W1, due for closure this month because the current owners of Tesco couldn't negotiate a satisfactory renewal of their lease with the current owners of the building.

There is nothing new about this story. For 30 years ordinary grocers and dairies have been driven out of the West End by rising overheads, their place taken by speciality restaurants, porn shops or advertising agencies—anyone with a more profitable line of business.

Tesco's, with the usual advantages of bulk buying, were able to succeed in Goodge Street. But only in a relative way, compared with the turnover of the really big hypermarkets that they and their competitors operate outside the city centre. The irony is that when the *Punters* team bought the same commonplace items at the small shops all around they cost exactly twice as much as the Tesco shopping basket. This is not a criticism of the other traders. They are obliged to buy dear and sell dear.

But of course there are plenty of low income people in London W1. Apart from the dear old folk who have lived there for ever and are bewildered by the changes all around them, there are the nurses and ancilliary staff at University College Hospital and the Middlesex Hospital who are obliged to do their shopping locally. How dare their employers occupy sites which could fetch a mint in the open market?

There is too a great phalanx of invisible people who come in every morning for low-wage cleaning and servicing jobs and return just in time to pick up ordinary bits of family shopping at Tesco.

The *Punters* producers kept trying to contact the right top person at Tesco and kept getting fobbed off until suddenly, at the last minute, came the message that the lease was to be renewed and that the shop would stay open. As a concessionary gesture, of course, to the customers.

It's an interesting tale for a whole variety of reasons. Should we congratulate Tesco for being willing to keep open, not a loss-maker, but a less-than-average profit-maker? I've watched this firm's remarkable investment and disinvestment in Colchester. They had a big shop in the centre of town, in Head Street, which they closed to move into a vast superstore with car-parking overhead in St John's Street. The paintwork in this brand new building had no time to get scuffed before it was closed when Tesco moved again to a hypermarket outside the town.

Other retailers in the same town have made the same leaps, and the implications were brought home to us by accident last week in Bury St Edmunds, when we needed to buy vegetables. In the centre of that city you can buy shares, houses, or cars, compact discs or any kind of tourist junk, but not fruit and veg.

The Goodge Street syndrome applies in fact throughout rural England. Well-off people never shop in the village store. "We couldn't possibly afford it," they say as they sail off in their Volvos to the hypermarket on the outskirts of the nearest town. Brian McLaughlin in his unpublished final report to the Department of the Environment on *Deprivation in Rural Areas* found that: "A common explanation given by the better-off households for not using local shops was their high costs."

Poor people in villages, just like their counterparts in London W1, are obliged to shop locally. In the country they have no alternative without access to a car. In London it will cost them 50 pence just to take a trip to an area of greater choice. In village England that choice doesn't exist.

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Watch out Fergie

If little Beatrice has her whooping cough jabs, they could trigger convulsions, brain damage or death. That's because the government makes doctors use an old-fashioned British vaccine, even though safer vaccines are made abroad.

Jesse Jackson: Mike Dukakis can still win

Cliff Richard: 100 years old and always young

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THE DIGGER

There's an elegant garden waiting to burst forth from Stuart Weir's urban wasteland. But not this year…

Every year it's in spring that my fancy turns to thoughts of re-stocking my garden and, of course, that's too late. The flowers I buy in the various garden centres of north London simply don't have time to mature, and nearly all my bulbs push up fine foliage and nothing else. So it is that in late summer and early autumn the front garden has only a tiny fuchsia in flower and the back a few fading yellow roses.

This year, though, was to be different. I set aside last weekend to get out and buy loads of bulbs and young delphiniums, anemones (japonica, the tall, courtly ones) and whatever else took our fancy. The reality was quite different.

To get Saturday right, I planned an 8am raid on Safeways, but when I jumped virtuously into the car, I discovered that someone had slashed the front tyre. (I always dread not being able to loosen the bolts; this time, they turned at once. Instead, the catch on the spare wheel mounting was inexplicably tight, and it took two men, a claw-hammer and a bruised thumb to extricate it.)

Then there was the puppet show for the kids, a dog to walk, Safeways (late), buying a new tyre, shopping and cooking for a supper party, baths and stories…and a friend's birthday party to go to on Sunday. (How do the likes of Leapman organise their lives to get so much time in their gardens and allotments?)

At this rate, the gardens won't look much different this time next year. I did manage to buy and plant a single pink anemone japonica in the front garden and to chuck round seeds from a couple of pods (they are so minute, I really have little faith that they 'll grow. But who knows?); and to dig in a lavatera in the back. The lavatera is something of a find. It's a splendidly huge bush, which brims over with pink or white flowers, summer and autumn; or at least the one in Maria's garden does. My plan is to plant a white one close to the pink shrub I've just planted. That should make a very extravagant display.

But where to place them? That led to a really enjoyable wander round the wastes of fat hen and brambles with Liz and Jill and her kids, pondering over just what shape the elegant garden which is to emerge from our urban pastures should take. And should the lavatera be fully in the sun to blossom as Maria's does?

We finally decided that it should go right at the bottom of the flower garden to be, right in front of the trellis we have yet to build. This meant trimming the honeysuckle which spills over the fence from our neighbours' garden, cutting back the blackberries and clearing a patch amid the long yellow grass.

Then we pottered. Pottering, in my view, is one of the unsung pleasures of gardening. I weeded, tied up and tidied a clematis, took a saw to an ungainly old rose, created a sprawling pile of green onto which Jesse, four years old, proudly chicked armfuls of fat hen he had industriously pulled up. "Look, Stuart!"

In the front, I dug out a couple of young sycamores and pruned the buddleia by the front wall: it was squashing the fuchsia and threatening to poke passers-by in the eye. The buddleia is a pushy character and I was utterly astonished to discover that it had contrived to graft branches onto a nearby shrub with variegated leaves. Actually, a new buddleia had lodged itself precariously on a patch of earth halfway up the wall and was growing through the shrub. Still a remarkable accomplishment, but not the discovery to set the gardening world agog I thought I'd made. Shame. I pulled the youngster out and stuffed it in the dustbin.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward finds that the Rochdale pioneers had it right all along

I want to return to the topic of the socially useful but unviable shop (see *NSS*, 16 September). In 1974 about 13,000 village stores had survived, by 1984 there were 12,000 and by 1988 only 11,000. No one doubts their decline and everyone knows that if you renamed such a shop "Country Bygones" or turned it into a wine bar, you might make a living.

You have only to think of the far wider range of items in a general store and the far smaller retailer's mark-up on any of them to see how hard a store is to run. There was a time in our history when it might be assumed that the co-operative movement had a vital role to play in providing this kind of service, which was commercially unviable but socially vital.

There are certainly villages where the co-op is the one remaining useful shop. But there are even more where the centralising tendencies, which have affected the co-ops just as much as their rivals, have closed the local shop, just as though the whole co-operative ideology had never been evolved.

Sometimes the original spirit survives. Miners in the upper Afon valley started the Blaengwynfi co-op in the 19th century and rebuilt their shop in 1905. By 1969 rationalisation of the movement put it into the hands of the Co-operative Retail Services who closed it in 1983. After an epic local struggle for alternative support the Gwynfi co-op re-opened in 1984.

The same year saw the opening of another community venture in Polstead, Suffolk, the very next village to where I live. There hadn't been a shop in the village for ten years, and a questionnaire circulated by the Women's Institute tried out the idea of a community shop—who would use it and who would help run it. After a public meeting a committee was formed, and a building provided in the form of a "mobile home" sited in the centre of the village.

Apart from its own fund-raising endeavours, small loans came from the parish council, the district council and the village's care and share committee. The shop opened that spring, run by a rota of two dozen volunteers. At the time its chairwoman, Erica Pomerans, stressed to me that there was nothing unique about that venture and that every village had its own varied human resources and opportunities. It had a turnover of £300 a week and prices were comparable with those of supermarkets in the nearest towns. She told me that, "It has become a social centre too, in just the way we hoped it would. Not only for the old people living nearby, but for women with young families. For them it's more than a grocery shop. It's a local focus: somewhere to take the children to". She pointed out that if the shop were run for profit, with its minimum overheads, it would bring in about £50 a week, which could not provide an income for a trading family.

The venture has prospered marvellously since then. Last year 40 volunteers built new larger premises as a prize-winning annexe to the village hall. The turnover for its 3½-day week has doubled. I asked Erica Pomerans the same question about commercial viability. She replied that a family willing to open all hours might make a go of it, but at a great cost. Not just in terms of their own lives, but in terms of much higher prices, of dropping a whole range of stock just because it wasn't profitable, and of poaching on the fragile pre-existing shopping networks: the travelling vans, the paraffin man, and so on.

It has kept its momentum, it is a village focus and notice board, and it provides an outlet for local producers. It has become a community cement. But its lessons are clear: if you want a shop that really serves a small community, fairly, you have to do it yourself. When the co-operative movement began in Toad Lane, Rochdale, its humble founders knew this perfectly well.

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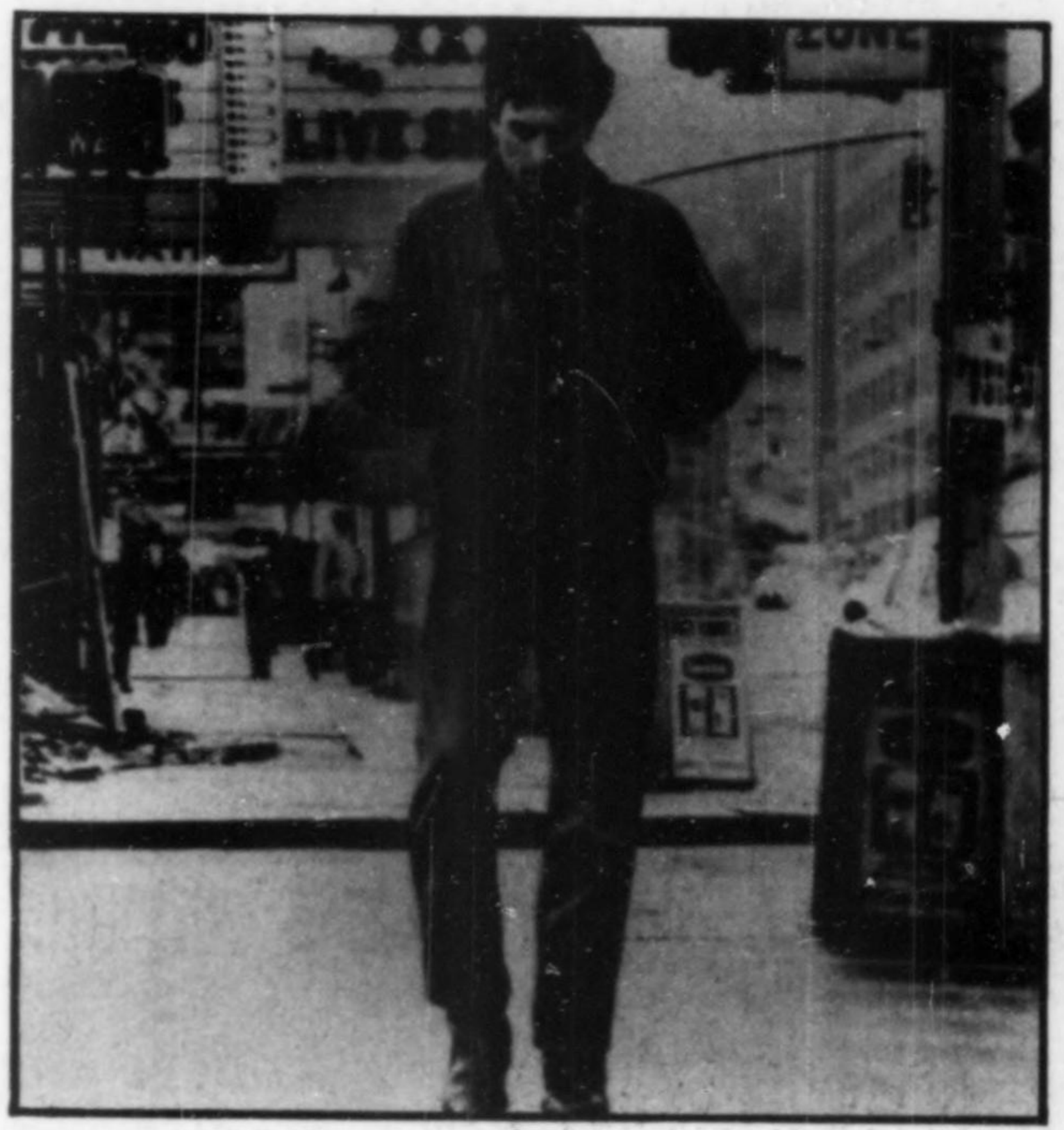
City politti



You walk with short, sharp steps, your body a compact, hard projectile. You take bearings from the Golden Arches of a fast-food empire. Electromagnetic sightlines link the Square Mile to Wall Street. Tune in to the Metropolis of Tomorrow. . .

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THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman closes in on the trail of the Brixton Fox

We get visits on the allotments from strangers in the night. Last week my neighbour showed me where one of his late (in two senses of the word) lettuces had been downtrodden and disturbed by an alien foot; and one of my tomato plants was toppled to the ground in its prime.

We used to think it was the work of vandals or rampaging dogs, but now the consensus is that we have a fox. People even tell me where it lives, under a bramble bush on a disused plot, but I have never set eyes on it. I was inclined to dismiss it as fevered fantasy—the Brixton Fox sounds more like an inmate of the penal institution next door—until I saw one in my garden a few months ago: and that's a couple of miles closer to the centre of London.

My neighbour is all for getting up a posse and gunning down the beast or beasts, but I don't think shooting foxes is acceptable even in Brixton. I've never seen any foxhound packs in the area, except at the occasional horse show on Clapham Common; so we'll have to learn to live with the sly beasts.

I was glad they had not strayed on to the seed bed and interfered with my autumn seedlings, which I planted out in their final positions last week. It was really too dry for it but I believe it is more important to get the timing right in terms of the seedlings' development than in terms of the weather. When you only visit the allotment once a week you can't be choosy. I had sown the lettuce and spring cabbage in the second half of August. They flourished in the Indian summer, despite the lack of rain, and were clearly ready to be moved once I'd given them a good soaking.

I wrote at sowing time that I had mistakenly bought a variety of autumn lettuce, Marmer, that's supposed to be grown under glass. But I put them in anyway and they are flourishing outdoors so far, sturdy little seedlings with jagged leaves. Unless we get unusually cold weather before the end of October we should be eating them by November. I also sowed some seeds of Arctic King, a hardy lettuce which should head up in the spring if the winter isn't too fierce. I transplanted those last week too.

My fourth row of plant-outs were Welsh onions. This is a miraculous vegetable that I was introduced to many years ago when I used to write about my allotment in another journal. A reader sent me a clump of about half a dozen plants that looked like spring onions, although with a mauve tint to the bulb. She told me to separate and then put them in.

Every summer since they have multiplied, like garlic and shallots, with each original plant producing about a dozen new ones. Two dozen make a full row, so in September I dismember just two plants to take care of next year's replanting—and use the rest as salad onions, the kind that make the back of your throat tingle. The plants I divided last week are descended from those the generous reader sent me.

I don't often write about flowers but I must share one of my peeves. On television and radio and in print, experts have been telling us since mid-September that it is time to plant bulbs for next spring. This advice seems to arrive earlier every year, like Christmas wrapping paper in the supermarket—and it shows how the experts don't live in the real world. Few of us have space to put a bed aside specifically for spring bulbs: they have to take their turn in the main flower bed, where the late summer blooms will not die down for some weeks. The geraniums still have a lot of flowering to do and until they vacate the space the spring bulbs will have to wait.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward concludes that art education may not produce good art but it does produce good citizens

Watching the telly-tribute to Richard Demarco, the Edinburgh gallery-owner and impresario, reinforced the feeling that has been building up inside me for years—that the importance of the arts is not the product (boring, pretentious and overpriced) but the process.

I know from experience that Demarco is a better interpreter of his city than a hundred guides from the Scottish Tourist Board or the District Council. He is better than anyone since Patrick Geddes, the extraordinary biologist, or R L Stevenson, the novelist. In fact, I find myself paying the same tribute to the creative imagination in every field.

For example, among the hundreds of primary and secondary teachers I have met, a surprising number of the most exciting were products of the art colleges rather than of the teacher-training institutions. And it is also my experience that the best teachers of say, maths, physics, geography or technical drawing at any level, have been those who turned their attainment-packed subjects into an art.

When I taught at Croydon Technical College, I found that the PE teacher was no rugger-bugger. He was involved with "the inner art of the body". Later when I taught at the then Wandsworth Technical College, the students, freed from compulsory schooling at least, remembered drama at Southfields School, music at Wandsworth School and art at Elliot School, as their most important contacts so far with the education industry.

It is not because there is anything wrong with specialist secondary technical education that the current government's concern with city technology colleges is so suspect. It is because these privately educated and grammar school ideologues don't realise that humbler precursors, like, for example, the Stanley Technical School in Croydon, provided a liberal education in which the arts had a greater significance than the technocrats want to believe.

Their thinking is, tediously, based upon adulterations of Martin Wiener's book *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit.* The book discusses the dreary and academic influence of the public and grammar schools, and of course the universities their products attended, but not the educational experience of humbler people who just wanted to get by. Their experience of schooling has been decried both by elite conservative theorists as anti-entrepreneurial, and by Marxists too, as a mere learning to labour.

Both sides have got it wrong. When you meet those people who have made a creative transition from redundancy or the dead shop floor into some new livelihood of their own, you find that they are more like drop-outs than like the new heroes of the enterprise culture. They don't want to make a million and despise the people who do. They just can't stand being pushed around.

And when you probe into the sources of their individualism it is often not because anyone introduced them to the idea that success came from buying cheap and selling dear, but because of some well-remembered teacher of English, art, music or drama. From these teachers, from the ones who made an art out of teaching any subject, they learned that the personal, subjective imagination was something to be cherished, and not devalued, in every field.

By now I've met this characteristic in so many contexts that I adopt it as a general assumption. A background in any of the arts may not make for good art (experience tells us the opposite) but it does encourage innovation, improvisation and creative solutions. Sometimes, just as a fringe benefit, it adds graphic, dramatic and even verbal skills. And a bit of good lettering never did any community activity any harm.

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Autumn Books

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THE DIGGER

Lead ruins Stuart Weir's dreams of an inner-city orchard

One of the happiest afternoons of my life was spent up a mulberry tree in Hackney. My sons and I stripped to the waist in the hot August sun and clambered through the spiky branches. We finally made off, scratched and stained purple, with mulberry juice trickling out of three torn plastic carrier bags bulging with fruit.

We gave loads away and still had enough for two sumptuous mulberry pies. (If you've never tasted the fruit, you really should; it's richer by far than any other of our berries.) But when we returned the following summer, Hackney council had destroyed the tree along with the Victorian villas in front of it.

I decided to make amends for my party's vandalism, but there wasn't room in Balls Pond Road for a mulberry tree. As soon as we moved into Stoke Newington six years ago, however, I at once planted a six-year old tree. Mulberry trees grow slowly. It's still only six-foot tall and produces about three dozen berries.

I planted redcurrants and gooseberries, too, pruned the blackberries which were already there and set out some raspberry canes. This summer I cleared the way for some espalier apple and pear trees. I added the mulberries to a summer pudding, along with the other fruit, and dreamed about the first mulberry pie. Soon, I thought, soon...

It was Tim Lang, the amazingly energetic man behind the London Food Commission, who disturbed my Eden-like dreams of an orchard in inner London. "I see you're growing carrots," he said. "They will probably contain a high level of lead. By all means, eat them yourselves, but don't give them to your kids. They'll cause brain damage."

At that I put off my plans for the apple and pear trees and got hold of a copy of the Southwark environmental health report on lead in London soils and vegetables. Bad news: "Lettuce and blackberries are unsuitable crops to be grown in inner London." On the other hand, the lead levels in the soil and vegetables varied quite considerably and our house is on a quiet street near a very large park. So I decided to test my blackberries and mulberries. I sent samples of washed and unwashed blackberries, and a few precious mulberries, to the Southwark laboratory. I washed the fruit because it can be contaminated by airborne lead dust as well as through the soil itself.

I have just had an illuminating report back from Tim Lobstein at the Food Commission. The general level of lead content allowed for food is equivalent to one part in a million (1mg/kg). But for young children the official safety line is a fifth of that level, ie 0.2mg/kg.

I didn't get a result on my unwashed blackberries—which, not so incidentally, my kids and all their friends have been picking (ie, scoffing) all summer. They arrived squashed at the lab and some juice (and therefore presumably some lead) clung to the inside of the bag.

The unwashed mulberries scored just under 0.5mg/kg. Tim Lobstein concluded: "Washing the fruit may have reduced the lead levels, but as mulberries typically have a lot of skin undulations, and cannot be peeled, the total amount of lead that could be removed may not be as high as it is for other foods. *So don't offer these berries to a child.*"

I can live with a lost dream. But, as the environmental health report states, "Household dusts, dirt on children's fingers, etc, receive contributions from neighbourhood soils. Such a route may be more significant for the whole population than allotment produce." You can say that again. As loud as you can, please.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward gets new spectacles and sees the world through farmers' eyes

"Shall I give you a receipt?" the optician's assistant asked when I collected my glasses in our nearest town. "Don't bother," I replied, "there's no one I can claim it from".

"Well you can if you're a farmer," she explained as she wrote out the receipt. Flattered to appear so opulent, I had another sudden insight into the reasons why farmers are such figures of contempt among those who watch how they behave, most especially among their employees.

No doubt their spectacles are a business expense, necessary for reading the accountant's report. But so is everything else, like the 162,500 cars belonging to farmers and farmers' wives which are run on the business, together with their licensing, insurance, repairs and depreciation. Stories abound in rural areas about the variety of uses to which untaxed fuel oil is put, and the incredible number of other bills which can be business expenses, like electricity, telephone, house repairs and decorations, water charges and so on.

Farm workers don't *blame* their bosses for exploiting every loophole that their professional advisers can find. What they resent very bitterly is that their employers are so attuned to such advantages that they never stop to think how the people who work for them cope with the same kinds of expenditure, met out of actual income.

This is why Peter Medhurst, as agricultural secretary of the TGWU was moved to say that, "I am sure that if my members could offset the same items they would have a comfortable standard of living. Instead, 35 per cent of all farm workers have to claim Family Income Supplement".

It is asssumed that there are "perks" for the farm worker, like that mythical free milk, but once again, Brian McLaughlin in his still unpublished final report to the Department of Environment on rural deprivation, found that over 80 per cent of poor rural workers have no fringe benefits at all.

They don't pile into the Landrover for a weekly stock-up of larder and freezer, partly because they don't have that much money around at any one time, and partly because Dad is using the clapped-out old Vauxhall to oblige the boss on a rush job and pick up a couple of half-hundredweight bags of solid fuel for the Rayburn.

The poor always pay more, not just as buyers of small quantities from the nearest retail outlet but especially as they have to pay personally for goods that are taken for granted as business expenses by their employers—like the huge cost of running a vehicle. They in turn are up to their necks in debt because they have been persuaded by the Ministry of Agriculture and the EEC, and their financial advisers to buy more and more expensive machinery which can be sold off after a couple of years as a tax loss, but whose principal function is to employ fewer humans.

The farmers are caught in a trap of public policy. Subsidies have encouraged them to live beyond their income for years, and people who can remember pre-war days have every sympathy for the stabilisation of the industry that came from huge investment by the taxpayer. Other people have every kind of criticism of the way the money was used, and the environmental costs involved.

I want just to record the fact that the public sympathy towards farming has never been reflected in farmers' attitude towards their employees. It certainly wasn't in the years of poverty. And it wasn't in the decades of subsidised affluence. In the last boom year, 1982-3, farm incomes went up by 45 per cent, but the agreed increase in farm wages was 7.1 per cent. When we hear about the bad times coming for the agricultural industry let's remember that in boom or slump the farm workers have always been at the bottom of the pile.

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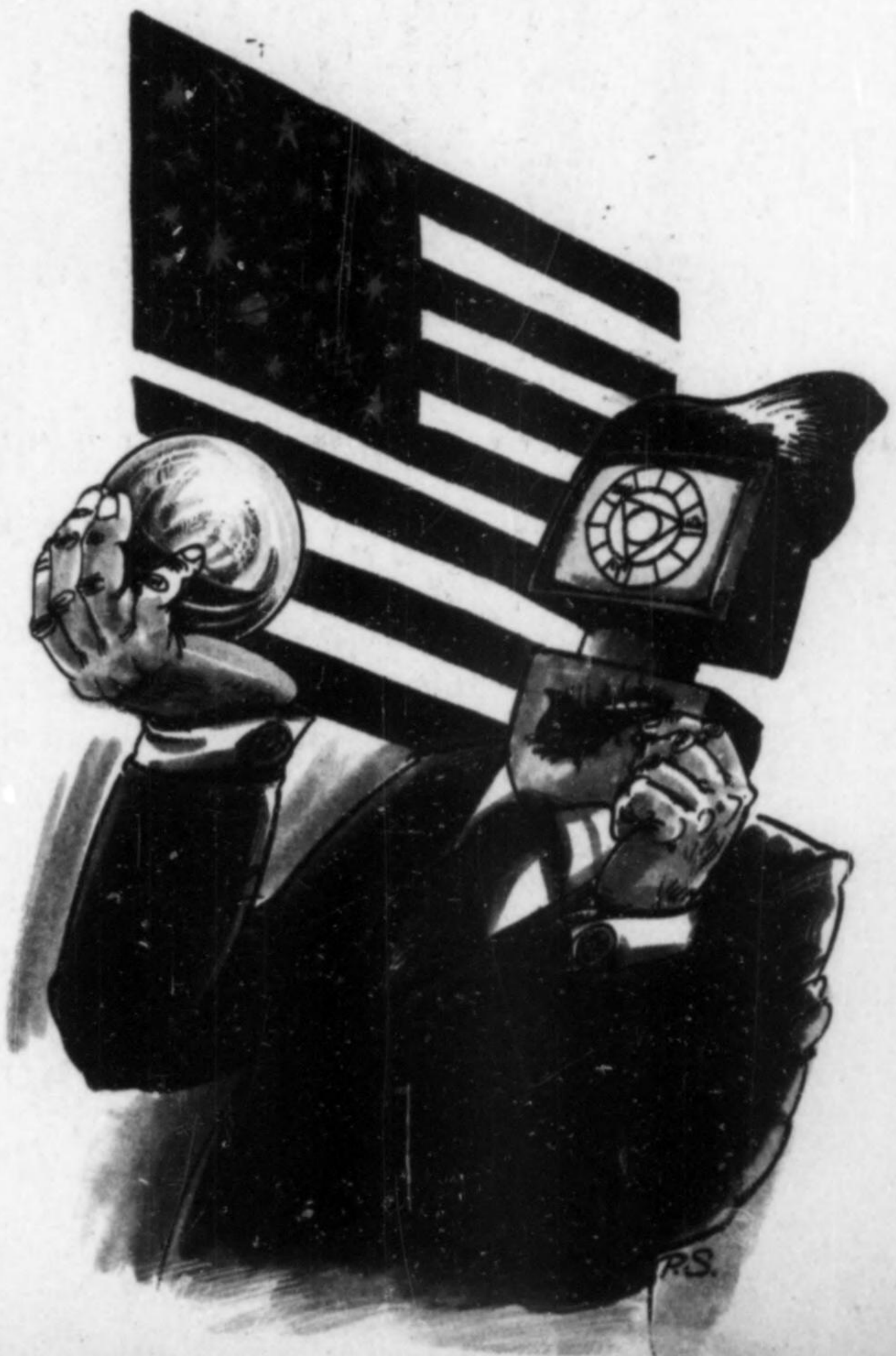

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The phantom femininity of fashion

Dead souls: a Catholic critique of Thatcherism

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THE DIGGER

Michael Leapman recalls that offspring are not always green-fingered

In this space three weeks ago, Stuart Weir was wondering how I organised my life to get so much time on the allotment. One answer is that I do not have the pressing social commitments of the editor of a distinguished political journal: my world is of radish and chicory, rather than radical chic. All the same, for most of the year I can get by with no more than three hours a week on the plot, although Olga comes with me on about half my visits, which pushes the average up to 4½ hours. (She tackles the jobs that require skill and dexterity, such as removing side-shoots from tomatoes and preparing a fine tilth for sowing and planting.)

But Stuart, as he admits, is not only weighed down with professional commitments but is also blessed with children of an age to require puppet shows, baths and stories. When our son Ben was at that stage we tried in various ways to get him interested in our horticultural endeavours, but with scant success. You would think it an ideal activity for children—an excuse to get really muddy and sometimes soaking wet, with the added prospect of gorging themselves on raspberries or carrots.

Ben used to try gallantly to get into the spirit of the enterprise but you could tell his heart wasn't in it. Too many things are forbidden on allotments—trampling over the lettuce, to name just one—and the adults are too busy to spend time amusing their young. As an only child, he may subconsciously have seen the allotment as an ersatz sibling, a rival for our attention. We even set aside a small corner of the plot as his own, but he found that keeping it weeded was an intolerable drudge, and when his produce disappeared beneath the unwanted foliage it was all too discouraging.

One year he did grow some carrots that won a prize at a local show: he had sown them in a deep box of potting compost, so weeds were no problem. But he was still not inspired to move on to cauliflowers and courgettes, as I hoped he might. At the allotment he would spend most of the time at the water butt, studying the insects that inhabited it. (Perhaps not wholly wasted, because he did well in A-level biology.)

Even Americans, generally so good at motivating children, have little success in this field. When I had a piece of a communal garden in New York, the mothers and fathers would energetically try to involve their brood, who were only truly interested in turning the hose on each other. At the height of a muggy New York summer, we all queued to be victims.

Speaking of hoses, I had a missive last week from my allotment landlord, the Thames Water Authority: the annual rent of the plot is to be doubled to £10.50 a year. I think it's because a private housing estate is being built alongside, on the site of an old factory. With privatisation in the wind, the authority feels it appropriate to increase the book value of its property.

When I took over the allotment a dozen years ago, the rent was 37½p a year. I shall pay the increased sum but it's hard to say whether it represents good value. When people ask me about the economics of having an allotment I reply pompously that they are missing the point, that what I value is the recreational aspect: a bargain compared with my £150 exercise bike, constantly needing repair.

If you insist on doing the sums, I reckon the value of the produce covers my £30 annual seed order, plus another £30 for fertiliser and compost, plus the new rent. But how do you cost Olga's and my 4½ priceless hours a week?

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward finds small-scale magnificence under threat in the Docklands

There are plenty of areas of no-man's-land that can be labelled both as inner city and as urban fringe, and an obvious one at the eastern end of the east end of London is the space enfolded by that bend in the Thames called Galleon's Reach.

It includes land acquired by the precursors of the Port of London Authority for extensions to the north of the Royal Albert Dock, which never happened, huge areas which were once the Beckton gasworks, still more that belonged to the bodies that became the Thames Water Authority as well as the East London Waste Authority's refuse destroyer and sorter.

Within this area there's a triangle of what might be called virgin land, since it has neither been built upon nor been subjected, like so much of its surroundings, to chemical pollution. Maps show it as playing fields, as a space earmarked by the river authority as a sludge lagoon and as allotments instituted in 1908, but declining in the 1970s.

With the growth of a new environmental consciousness, in 1976 a body was set up called Allotments for the Future "to promote communication and understanding between plotholders, planners and people on waiting lists, to encourage ideas and self-help, and to encourage responsibility about our environment and future people's needs".

It was chaired by a veteran plotholder, Bill Gladwell, and its secretary was Sheila Beskine, a seasoned worker in that field derisively called "pre-vandalism work", meaning finding ways of giving children creative involvement in the environment.

Hers is the one alternative we know to *destructive* involvement. Her credentials go back to the Stratford Butterfly Garden and Operation Goatsmile—which was based on the absolutely correct notion that everyone smiles when they meet a goat in the street, and wants to stroke it.

Her commitment to the Beckton area led to the Beckton Meadows Community Smallholding in one small 2½ acre wedge of that triangle of former allotment land.

It was waste-high in thistles by the time the authorities had agreed to re-fence it. Soon it will be reduced by the building of the Eastern Gateway Access Road for the proposed new Thames crossing.

But there I saw goats, geese, ducks, chickens, rabbits, and a magnificent sow, cherished by a group of people who are convinced that animal husbandry is an essential aspect of urban life and have a bunch of children and teenage boys to help. They would like some sheep too, and they recall that less than three years ago there was a patch called Arthur's Ground with pigs and even cattle in that triangle. Les Rice is a night-worker for whom the site is an immense release. Fred Parker is a chef who has the same view that contact with livestock is therapeutic for humans.

But these worthy, creative people are no match for the big, professionally-administered public bodies they have to beg from. There is the hard-pressed London Borough of Newham. There is the London Residuary Body, which through the accidents of history owns the site, and has a statutory duty to make the maximum gain from it. And there's the London Docklands Development Corporation, calculating the right time to offer the right price to the LRB for this unimportant patch of land which the East London Docklands CPO Inquiry of March 1986 held must stay green.

Hand it over to the landscape architects to spend millions, but do get it away from the squalid locals! This, I fear, is going to be the automatic approach to this bit of urban wasteland, unless there is someone up there with the same imaginative response that has been made from down below by people with no power, money or influence at all.

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Little Englanders

We're in the grip of a born-again cultural nationalism. The crusade of conservation, and the cult of the English countryside and all that is "traditional", reinforce the idea of the nation under siege. Inside: the pitfalls of Englishness

The INF treaty: more nukes for less

Ian Jack on the British motor industry

Child benefit: the antidote to dependency

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THE DIGGER

Stuart Weir makes a final trip to the garden centre before going into hibernation

Now that winter's nearly here I come into my own as a gardener. Out come all my gardening books, and the notes I've taken of flowers and shrubs I fancy at the gardens we visit during the summer, and I work on a grand colour-coded plan for the back. The idea is to have something in bloom at all times of the year, beginning with early flowers and shrubs outside the glass doors of our kitchen.

The great advantage of this gardening technique is that it's done in a warm, convivial atmosphere, and can easily be combined with a drink or two. It does occasionally mean a visit to a chum's house in north London. Phillip is a keen gardener who suffers from agorophobia. He only overcomes his fear of going out when he attends his local Labour Party branch meetings (he's the secretary) or combs garden centres and nurseries for unusual shrubs.

Phillip has gradually developed his own nursery along the side of his house and in the back garden. It makes a nice supplement to his invalidity benefit, but more important, it provides a steady flow of visitors like myself. He's amazingly knowledgeable about plants, and can get hold of

almost any rarity you come up with; and he has a couple of parrots which amuse the children. The only trouble is that he'd much rather talk about Neil Kinnock's prevarications over unilateral nuclear disarmament than, say, the woodland trilliums I'm dying to plant under my (er um) shrub with the white berries. I tell him that labourism makes poor soil for principled positions . . .

Occasionally, too, the grand plan demands that I brave the cold and rain to wheel a plastic trolley round the local garden centre and collect plants in good time for next year. I've just made a trip to collect the apple trees I've decided to plant, despite the presence of lead, to replenish the lupins and delphiniums that the slugs and snails gobbled up earlier this year, and to buy some bulbs to produce instant flowering patches here and there.

The trip was a bit of a wash-out. No apple trees at all. The potted delphiniums were mostly pretty battered and the lupins were all of the pinky-purply kind. Still, I gathered enough to make a show and bought lots of fascinating bulbs.

Naturally, the trip entailed several hours in the garden planting out the newcomers, digging out the weeds and brambles which had moved in after the snails had done their dirty work, pruning the hoary old rose bushes (or rather trees) which we inherited with the house, and generally tidying up. An early clematis has however spectacularly evaded my reach by attaching itself to my next-door neighbour's thorn tree and then sailing some 15 feet upwards through its branches.

The most tedious operation was laying wood ash round the newly planted lupins and delphiniums. I had to remove several charred planks from the ashes of a recent fire and found whole companies of snails bivouacked on the undersides. Suspicious that: I trust that Daphne Dennison, the reader who came up with this ploy, knows what she's talking about. Anyway, to comfort those readers who have felt discomfitted by my kindness to snails, I have to confess that on this occasion I was so exasperated, and alarmed, by their presence that I wiped most of them out with my spade. Well, it was getting cold and Georgia had woken early feeling sick . . .

Actually, that made a good excuse to up and off to Phillip's. Just as well, too, for today I am feeling decidedly creaky at the knees.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward wishes that he had long ago learned the rudiments of maintenance

Back in the 40s and 50s there was in New York a man called Eric Hoffer who wrote a couple of books, *The True Believer* and *The Passionate State of Mind*. They were about the psychology of the person who supported the parties that brought about Auschwitz on the one hand and the Gulag Archipelago on the other. Observers who got to the root of things were quite rare, and another rare thing about Mr Hoffer was that he wasn't employed at Columbia University: he worked in the docks.

Academic promoters of the proletariat as the seat of all wisdom couldn't believe their ears. How could this "longshoreman philosopher" as he became known, have a more subtle interpretation than their own? Eric Hoffer, the expert on the origins of totalitarianism, came to Britain in 1968 and was interviewed on Radio 3 (not 4) about his opinions on many other aspects of life.

He let slip a piece of ordinary observation which will always stay with me as one of those bits of advice I forever yearn to heed. What he said was: "After the last war, when Western Europe was in ruins, I thought to myself: 'If the President should pick me and send me to Europe to predict which country is going to recover first, I would get the answer in five minutes.' I would say: 'Bring me the records of maintenance. The nation with the best maintenance will recover first.' If I should go to Africa and want to tell you which of those 30-some nations is going to be here 50 years from now, I would look around for the rudiments of maintenance. If I got in there in the warehouse, let's say, and I saw that the broom had a special nail, I would say: 'This is the nail of immortality!'"

We all wish we were like those people who seem to have been born with an internal clock that includes time automatically devoted to maintenance. Their garden tools are oiled and always put away, their chisels and saws are always sharp and keen, hanging in the right place on the workshop wall, they have mastered the great art of housework by adopting apparently effortless routines, even their bicycles hang from the ceiling to avoid distorting the tyres, and the undersides of their cars are regularly rust-proofed. Their pencils are always sharp.

Whenever I meet one of these paragons I ask how they acquired these life-preserving habits. Very often they do speak of a stern father or frugal mother inculcating the rudiments of maintenance, or of the result of an old-fashioned apprenticeship in workshops where a text on the wall proclaimed that "The Man Who Lends the Tools is Out". Others stress they have learned the hard way that maintenance, rather than innovation, is a supreme virtue. Expensive failure has led them to revere the capacity for taking care.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the postwar history of public housing. Kenneth Campbell who used to be housing architect for the GLC took pleasure in mystifying audiences by equating the decline of public housing with the decline of the Royal Navy. He would explain that all those leading stokers and chief petty officers, needing a land base when they retired quite young, would take on the job of resident caretaker, taking pride in running what they invariably called "a happy ship".

The supply of these paragons dried up and the housing authority was obliged to adopt a policy of mobile caretakers. The one thing that has to be said about a mobile caretaker is that he has lost the incentive to take care. Contrast this with the tenant-controlled estates of Oslo, where the person awarded a gold medal for caretaking regularly employed the children of the estate to help clear the leaves in the autumn and the snow in the spring (with real money) and ensured that the rudiments of maintenance were a proper component of everybody's life.

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Uncertainty over NHS review thwarts RAWP

Controversy has dogged the National Health Service's RAWP (resource allocation working party) system since it was set up in the late 1970s. Its fine-sounding aim was to "equalise opportunity of access to health care" across England—but it has done so by taking from Peter to pay Paul. The health regions in the south-east lost funds while the north, in particular, gained.

The latest RAWP review has for the first time reversed this policy. Using a new "social deprivation factor", it recommends giving the N E Thames and S E Thames regions an extra £51.8m a year above their targets and the North Western, Mersey, Northern, Trent and W Midlands regions £75.4m *less*. These facts would normally have resulted in a major row and accusations of political interference, but while the government's NHS review is still going on and the existence of both district and regional health authorities is in the balance, the new health authority targets have been largely ignored.

There is no shortage of speculation about what the NHS review will contain—it now appears that Kenneth Clarke is moving more cautiously, perhaps following the collapse of some private hospitals in the USA due to a shortage of sick people. Mrs Thatcher has personally rejected plans to offer tax relief to people who opt out and go private. But there are plenty of supporters for the idea that the private sector should play a larger part in the NHS—the latest possibility floated is that private companies should be able to lease hospitals to the NHS and provide management.

Lack of public funding has already encouraged some hospitals to start offering facilities for private patients (including, sometimes, telexes and fax facilities for those who need to keep working to pay the insurance premiums) and set up deals with fast-food chains in hospital concourses. Limited experiments in what is known as "internal markets" (the buying and selling of services between health authorities), are already taking place in East Anglia, Yorkshire and the South West.

Internal markets and the RAWP formula could live together reasonably comfortably. Regions already serve patients outside their catchment areas and RAWP takes account of this by a cumbersome and always out-of-date allowance called "cross boundary flow". Health authorities would continue to get weighted cash allowances (minus the existing weighting for "outside" patients) and simply buy or sell services at what they actually cost.

But this can only work if the internal market remains mainly internal to the NHS. If management teams, for example, could buy and sell health services from and to a range of private and public organisations on behalf of a resident population, it would shake the very foundations on which RAWP was built—namely to fund the regional health authorities to ensure health equity right across the country.

If RAWP allocation takes account of *private* capacity, then the public sector will suffer cutbacks. If it doesn't, then regions that don't have much private capacity will suffer, since they have smaller overall resources. If some hospitals in richer areas can attract private money through deals, for example, with retail stores selling to better-off people in the concourse, should RAWP ignore this or cut back public funding so that every hospital initiative is rewarded with a cutback? The health authorities are waiting to know their fate. So are the rest of us.

Vicky Hutchings

"Yes, we boobed"

The Department of Employment admitted this week that they got vital figures wrong in 1983 but they don't intend to rework them as they "don't have the resources".

In June this year, a major row erupted over the new DSS figures for 1981-1985 which said that the poorest 20 per cent had a real rise in income of 6.6 per cent. Family Expenditure Survey (produced by the DE) figures were analysed by Peter Townsend to produce the opposite: a 20 per cent *drop* of 5.1 per cent.

Since then, say the DSS, "there has been a certain amount of investigation with the DE about how appropriate their figures were". On 30 June, the DSS wrote to the Commons' Social Services Committee saying that although Townsend's arithmetic was correct, the information it was based on wasn't. The letter was due to be published in the DSS reply to the Committee's fourth report on Families on Low Income. This decision has been reversed.

The discrepancy also caused confusion in the DE itself. Figures for 1983 will now appear with a "health warning", say the DE who claim to be very grateful to Townsend — "our quality control." *Vicky Hutchings*

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward on the dangers of Spider Catching in the workplace

Spiders are the friends of mankind, but this particular creature has always aroused irrational fears. Just recently a childhood memory of one particular spider incident surfaced after 50 years.

My father was the headteacher of Custom House Junior Elementary School in Canning Town in what—in those days—was the County Borough of West Ham. Those of his pupils' fathers actually in work were employed in the Royal Albert Dock. One day one of them was, as usual, unloading bananas, and from one of the bunches of green fruit emerged a tarantula spider.

Quick as a flash he trapped it in a WD & HO Wills tobacco tin and took it home to entertain the family. Next day his son brought it into school to show Sir and the class, but the unfortunate spider escaped from the tin and caused panic, until the ever-reliable teacher, Jack Tulloch, recaptured it.

My dad explained to me that there was a widespread belief that the merest touch of this particular spider brought about a dancing disease, an incurable mania. Hence Rossini's *Tarantella*. Its bite was fatal, so it was said.

I had totally forgotten this episode until I heard Sophie's tale. She's 17 and picked up all the right O-levels, but after spending one day at the sixth form college, decided it wasn't for her. So she got a job in an out-of-town hypermarket, on the fringes of Ipswich.

Unpacking bunches of grapes from a carton, she was actually bitten by an emerging spider. As a sensible person, Sophie realised that the incident shouldn't be ignored and after insisting that she be sent to hospital for investigation, was consequently despatched, alone, in a taxi. The spider was apprehended in a plastic margarine carton.

At the hospital in Ipswich they took her misadventure seriously, seeking some kind of identification. They got in touch with Rentokil Limited who operate such a service, but who couldn't do it instantly. Similarly, Colchester Zoo were willing, but unable, to do an instant analysis to ascertain whether or not the bite should cause concern.

They did the sensible thing, pumping her full of antibiotics and telling her to go to bed. Meanwhile they had contacted someone from the shop in question to find out whether the grapes came from the Mediterranean or from the Americas. I am told that the hypermarket representative's contribution to Sophie's case was to warn her that if she was off work for a week she wouldn't get paid.

Hospital personnel reminded the spokesperson that if it was their grapes it was their spider, and it seems difficult to believe that the employers' attitude would be sustainable in court. But the episode is a reminder of two quite important issues, apart from Sophie's alarmingly swollen arm.

The first is that many people from both right and left (including me) have urged that protective legislation be relaxed in the interests of the small employer, just to encourage him or her to provide jobs. But who takes advantage of this *laissez-faire* approach? Not our small employer, but the vast corporation, in denying responsibility for Sophie's spider.

The second is that, given a bizarre situation like Sophie's bite, the hard-pressed hospital staff responded to her problem, contacted every available source of information, and adopted every precautionary measure. Next time you have the bad luck to be bitten by a spider (who may not be a British national) think of the implications of Sophie's case.

But I have to remind you of the old verse: "If you wish to live and thrive/ Let the spider run alive."

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The end of sex

Britain has become a less tolerant and more censorious place in the 1980s. Inside we chart the decline of permissiveness and the rise of the new moralism

Euro-citizens: 1992 and the new racism

The MI5 Wilson plot: the gagging goes on

Poland: on the edge of democracy

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Adrian Brooks/The Times

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side and Scotland.

Besides offering telephone advice, Mainliners also helps people who are diagnosed HIV positive, and offers small grants, counselling, help with housing and with children. So far it has received money from charities, regional health authorities and a few social services departments. None of the £3m recently made available by the minister of health for services to combat AIDS and drugs misuse has yet been provided to the new organisation.

The launch of Mainliners comes just a week after the Association of Chief Officers of Probation called for urgent action to combat the threat of HIV infection in its response to a report from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. ACOP wants more resources, better coordination and better training in counselling for probation officers working in prisons.

Nick Fielding

Mainliners can be contacted on 01 – 738 7333

Swings and roundabouts

The country's first City Technology College will be officially opened today (4 November) at Kingshurst, Solihull—but none of the Labour councillors who represent the area (north Solihull) will be there, nor any of their Birmingham colleagues.

The CTC has cost the government £2.45m, which is more than half the total capital expenditure of neighbouring Birmingham on all its 483 schools. Nick Stephens, the Labour spokesman on education in Solihull told *NSS* that the academic intake of the school had been of above average pupils—"it's clearly operating a selective policy".

As the CTC opens the neighbouring Simon Digby school is being considered for closure. Stephens, who is also a governor of the Simon Digby school, commented, "It is clearly no coincidence that this school is coming under threat of closure as the CTC opens. The CTC is on the site of a secondary school that was closed five years ago on the grounds of falling rolls."

Labour councillor Alf Hill, also on the board of governors of Simon Digby school, said, "the school is a community school, it runs evening classes and is used by all sorts of organisations, even for weddings. If it closes children will have to travel to neighbouring schools, and for people in this area, who are already at the sharp end of the government's policies, the extra cost will not be easy to find".

Claire Sanders

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Out of sight out of mind

The annual report of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, published today, makes depressing reading, as restrictions on visitors, refugees and immigrants get ever tighter and the nastier bits of immigration control are exported abroad, where they're out of sight.

Here's just one disturbing story from the report. In December 1985, JCWI applied for asylum on behalf of an Iranian doctor who had fled Iran during the Gulf War. Two and half years later, an official replied. His letter said: "It is clear that... Dr Simonian has a distaste for the battlefield... he stretched out his research for as long as he could to avoid going to the front... Whatever Dr Simonian's views on the Gulf War might be, his skills as a doctor in the front line are clearly needed for humanitarian purposes. It is strange, therefore, that a man now claiming to be so highly principled in his objection to the Khomeini regime was so easily able to abandon the oath he had presumably taken to heal the sick and to take the opportunity in 1985 of escaping to the UK." JCWI protested. Dr Simonian was immediately granted exceptional leave to remain here. The official has now been transferred from the Immigration and Nationality Department.

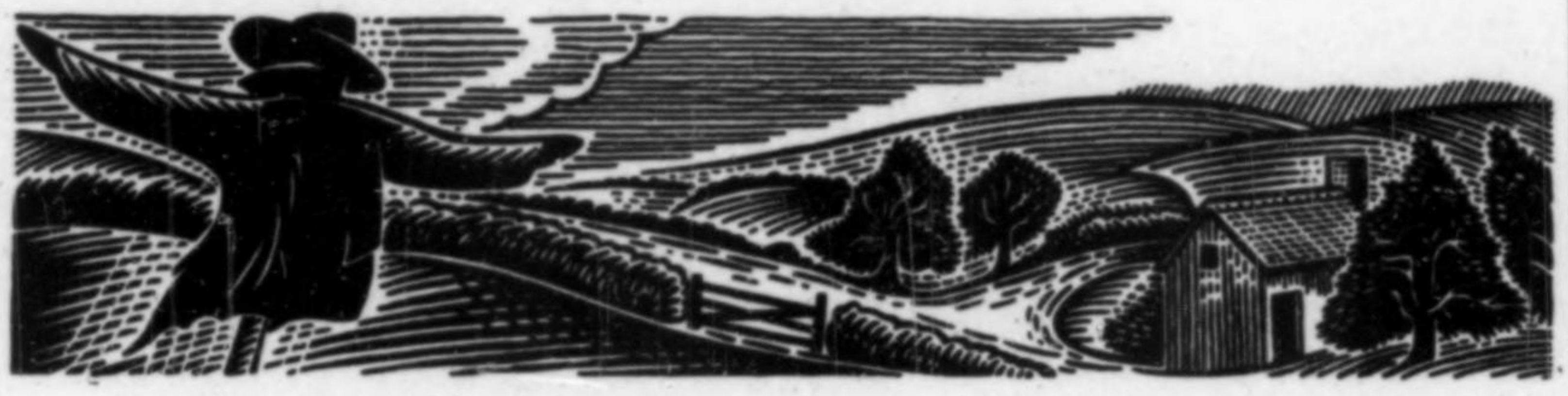
The report comments that the case "showed a standard of decision-making and professional conduct which would have been alarming in any civil servant but which was quite unacceptable in a senior official regularly deciding on the fate of asylum-seekers".

JCWI also notes that the immigration service is pressing for tighter restrictions on students entering Britain; but, says the report, it is bogus colleges that need stricter controls, not bona fide students who are often being penalised instead.

Jolyon Jenkins

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward identifies with scarecrows and hedge-preachers



From the moment it first appeared I have felt at home with Cliff Harper's vignette of the scarecrow, arms outstretched in a vain rhetorical gesture, preaching to the birds.

That's me, I said, reflecting that all through life, my nearest and dearest have reproached me with looking like a scarecrow. My intentions have always been quite different. I just wanted to be unnoticeable in a crowd. Decent, if shabby-genteel, anonymity has been my aim. "Never trust a sharp dresser" has always been my advice to fellow-citizens who have sweated for decades and have then handed over the savings of a lifetime to smartly-dressed crooks, whether political or financial.

There was a disgraceful episode in British politics when Michael Foot, a worthy back-bench hedge-parson, allowed himself to become first a minister and then a political leader. The climax of the campaign to ridicule him came, not because of any political statement he might have made, but because at the cenotaph in London, dressed as an ordinary citizen, just like the millions whose deaths were being commemorated. The irony is that he had probably made a great effort to smarten himself up for the occasion.

Those who tacitly accept that the art of the couturier or tailor is the ultimate in politics shouldn't grumble when they find themselves ruled by well-heeled, well-dressed dummies or gangsters. But of course there's an informal style too, endlessly working its way up from the working-men's outfitters to the Kings Road. And, fortunately, there's an Oxfam/jumble sale aesthetic too.

Among the poorly-dressed, just as you can't turn a corner in Cornwall without bumping into a potter, so in Suffolk you can't pass a bus-stop without seeing a writer. I've noticed, for example, Ronald Blythe, endlessly waiting for Chambers' bus to take him to a school appointment or an Eastern Arts engagement, just for love of the trade of writing.

Or there's the novelist Peter Vansittart. He gets the train to Colchester and then Mr Norfolk's bus to the nearest stop, about five miles from home, and then walks in all weathers, hair and raincoat blowing in the wind, trudging through the lanes, picking up a stick or two for kindling and pausing now and then to put a point down in his notebook. It's an ordinary fact that apart from residents walking their dogs, he and I are the only pedestrians in our patch. Mothers consequently warn their children about these dishevelled prophets or scarecrows passing by.

> *Those who tacitly accept that the art of the couturier or tailor is the ultimate in politics shouldn't grumble when they find themselves ruled by well-heeled, well-dressed dummies or gangsters*

This is why I welcome a new book from another Suffolk village author. Peter Haining's *The Scarecrow: Fact and Fable* (Robert Hale £11.95) examines the scarecrow as an artefact all through history, as well as the human variety, young children or old men, whose task has been to frighten the birds away from crops. He also gathers together the disproportionate role of the scarecrow in folklore, verse, fiction, plays and films, from the original *Wizard of Oz*, through Worzel Gummidge down to Dennis Potter.

I wish he'd projected the idea of the scarecrow as a conveyor of disgruntled wisdom just one stage further. It's a matter of history that one generation's scarecrows (let's just mention Bunyan, Defoe, Clare, Cobbet or Robert Bloomfield) have been the bearers of a different generation's revered rural wisdom. It always cheers me up to reflect that the scarecrows, preaching their message out there in all weathers, might turn out to be closer to reality than the sensible, well-dressed citizens, back home investing.

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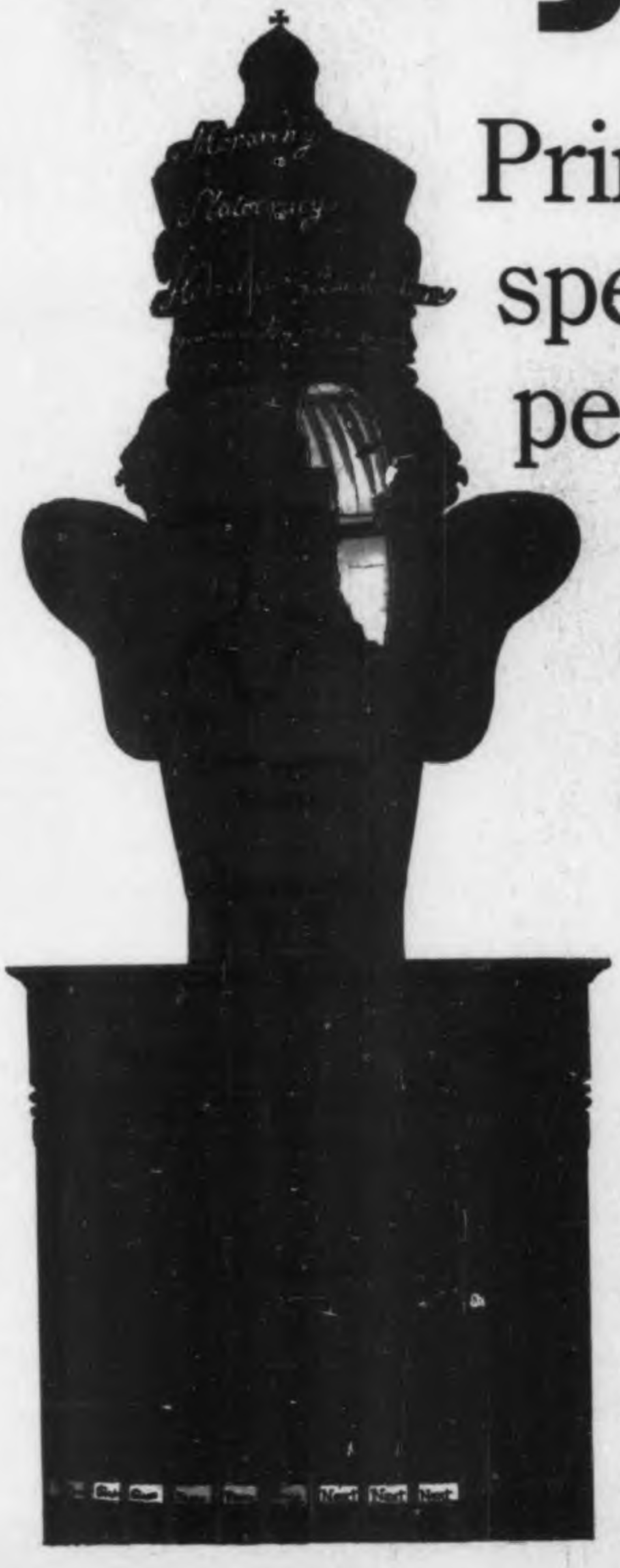
Charles as Everyman



Prince Charles speaks for a British people who can't speak for themselves. He's praised for that. But the logic of his position is republican, not royal. Read on inside

Gerry Adams: What I'd say to Robin Day

"Colors": the nightmare truth about the Los Angeles gangs

Television: who's afraid of investigative journalism?

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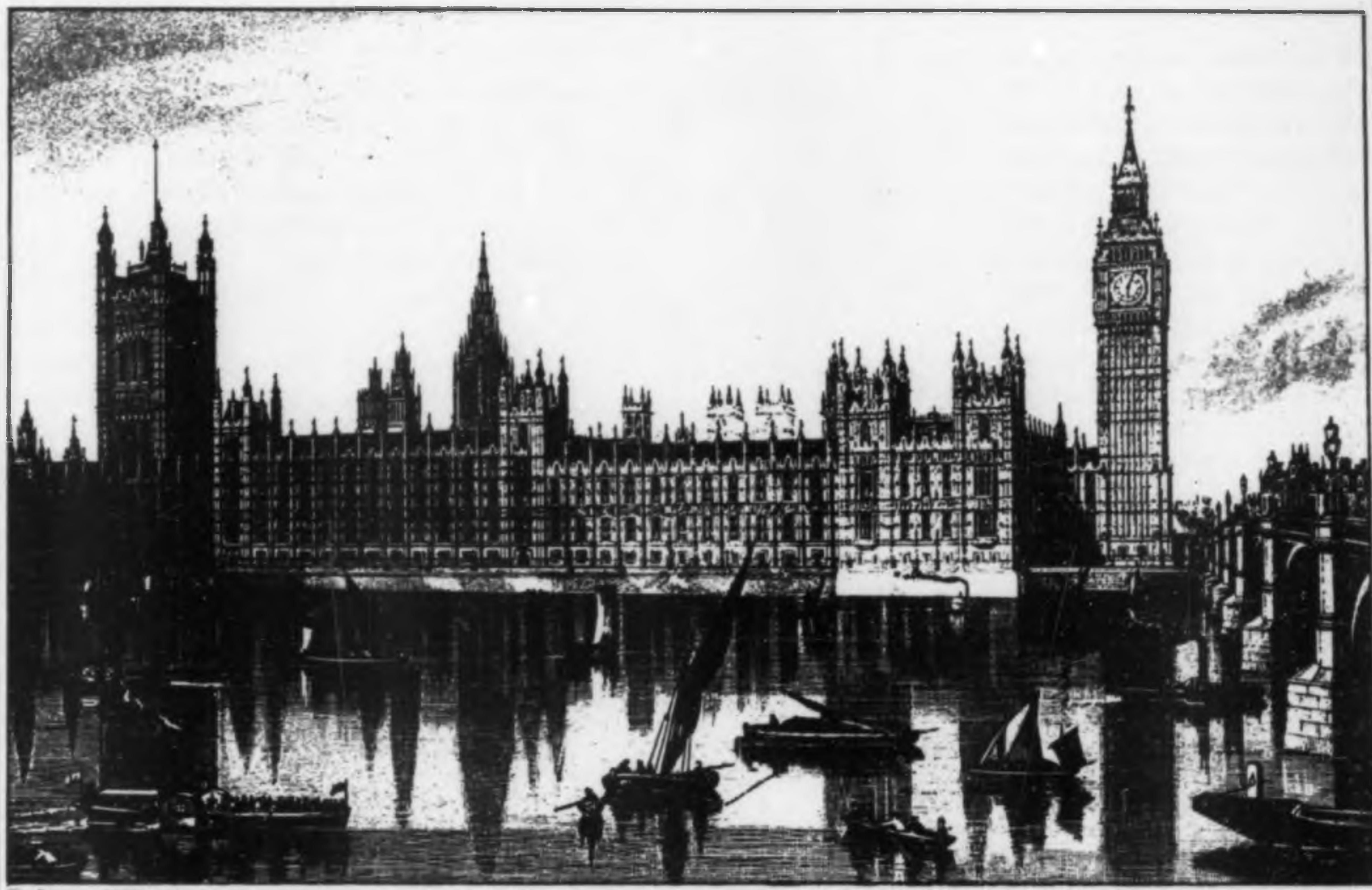

Mary Evans Picture Library

Palace of Westminster in 1870: fairyland castle rebuilt after 1832 fire as threw-back to feudal age. See Tom Nairn, p.8

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and that their wishes are being at best sidetracked and at worst ignored.

Tenants from Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Telford, Warrington and Basildon met in Basildon last Saturday (5 November) to complain at the government's delay in deciding the future of their homes. They were opposing plans to hand the management of the estates over to housing associations for at least two years before holding a referendum in which tenants could choose a landlord. The tenants want a ballot before their homes are transferred.

Ballots in Peterborough and Basildon have already shown overwhelming support for council ownership. In Basildon in a referendum run by the Electoral Reform Society, 98 per cent voted to transfer to the council on a turnout of 71 per cent.

A leaked letter from the DoE to Basildon development corporation revealed plans for the estates to be managed by housing associations for two years at least before the tenants are officially consulted. It noted that the new Housing and Local Government Bill will mean that houses have "to be purchased at market value subject to tenancy. This may make them unattractive to local authorities when they see the new financial regime to be introduced... " Tenants fear that the government is using delaying tactics so that by the time they vote, local authorities will be less well placed to buy their homes.

The DoE confirms the content of the letter, but says that this will enable tenants to make an informed choice. However, in the case of Peterborough it has made an exception because an official ballot has already been held. In a ballot with an 83 per cent turn out, 86 per cent voted to go to the council.

But tenants claim that those who voted in favour of housing associations are being transferred promptly, while the transfer to the council is being delayed for at least two years while the price of the homes is established.

Labour's housing spokesman Clive Soley told the conference that the government's action was not only an "appalling use of democracy", but by encouraging the private at the expense of the public sector, the supply of homes for the future was badly undermined.

Claire Sanders

End of the Geldof factor

The end of the "Geldof factor", long predicted, is clearly demonstrated in the latest set of charity statistics published by the Charities Aid Foundation.* Band Aid, which in 1985 had a greater voluntary income than any other charity, had slipped to ninth position in 1986 and for 1987—the latest figures available—had dropped to 179th place.

Oxfam, Save the Children Fund and War on Want, three of the largest overseas aid charities, also dropped in the ratings while medical and health charities showed the largest increases. The four biggest chest and heart charities enjoyed an increase of 25 per cent in voluntary donations.

CAF's annual survey shows that central government support for voluntary organisations grew by just 1.1 per cent in real terms during 1986/87 to £279.5m, while government-funded quangos increased their funding by only 1.7 per cent to £1.65bn. The Manpower Services Commission comes under this latter category.

Payments from local authorities to the voluntary sector fell for the second year running to £402m. Much of the decline can be put down to the demise of the GLC and the other metropolitan authorities. Northern Ireland bucked the trend by recording a 59 per cent real increase in funding. While local authority funding has declined, health authority donations have increased by nearly a third to £25.2m, although this is still a small figure.

Donations from the top 400 companies rose by eight per cent in 1986/87 to £72.5m, although this was just 0.2 per cent of pre-tax profits. For the first time CAF has tried to gauge non-cash donations: figures supplied by 110 companies indicated that out of a total of £98.2m, only 32 per cent was made up of cash donations. The rest was secondment, sponsorship and gifts in kind.

Despite Mrs Thatcher's strictures on the need for the wealthy to give to charity, figures from the Family Expenditure Survey show that people in the south of England gave less than in any other region—only £1.13 a week or 0.7 per cent of average household income.

Nick Fielding

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FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward meets a minority man with a casting vote

Midday last Friday I was standing on the steps of the Council House in Nottingham, talking to Alan Clark whose victory in the city's Byron ward by-election (by the biggest majority of any Labour councillor, he proudly told me) has changed Nottingham's political complexion.

We were surrounded by photographers and TV cameras. But they weren't pointing at him. They weren't even focused on the Conservative leader packing his papers in his Porsche with its personalised number plates. For the hero of the hour (and it does seem unfair on the victorious Councillor Clark) was another councillor, dutifully walking across the square to please the cameraman.

This was 66-year-old John Peck, decorated wartime pilot, veteran member of the executive of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and Britain's only Communist councillor, who now holds the balance of power. The by-election leaves Nottingham with 27 Labour and 27 Conservative seats and with Councillor Peck holding the casting vote.

His notion of the way to behave in this situation differs greatly from that of the Lord Mayor of Bradford. He recently described himself as a moderating influence, a curb on the political excesses of both sides, since he could "help prevent extremes in both cases and thus be of value to Nottingham and its people." He told me last week, "I support Labour for the council leadership, but don't take anything for granted. If an issue comes up supported by the Tories and it's in the interests of the city, I shall go along with them".

He knows that there is something absurd about the concept of democracy that makes him, holder of 1,417 votes in a city of 279,000, the arbiter of its politics. But as we all know, our electoral system at both local and national level is full of such absurdities. Ask the Scots.

Peck stayed out of Alan Clark's ward during the election to avoid giving any fuel to smear campaigns, which fell flat anyway since he has been active in local issues for longer than most people can remember. As the Nottingham *Evening Post* put it before the election, "For those who don't know of John Peck, the thought of a Communist putting a brake on extreme policies will be less easily absorbed than it is by those who do! But any opponent who tries to paint John Peck as a rabid militant is on a loser. He is an honest, sensible and intelligent man whose reputation as a crusader for the local community he loves transcends the political tag he carries."

On Monday, for example, he proposed two motions he had put down weeks ago with little hope of success. One related to the allotments in Blenheim Lane, Bulwell. Members of the allotment society approached him about alleged intentions to close the sites and add them to a neighbouring industrial estate. He found that no council committee had authorised this, but officers told him, "We'll consult the allotment holders once we've decided what to do". He got legal advice, organised a petition with 3,500 signatures, while bulldozers were already beginning to remove the topsoil. Planning permission was expected this month. His Monday motion will have saved the allotments.

His other motion was about the market traders in the Victoria Centre. A deal between the council and site-owners Capital and Counties proposed to clear out 28 traders and offer them pitches in the street itself at three times the rent. Too late to reverse the deal, his motion will at least retain the current rent. Why is this important? "Because it's the market, not the multiples, where poor people shop. Out of necessity."

So Britain's one Communist councillor provides two important lessons for other politicians. He doesn't despise the parish pump. He probably wouldn't agree with Herbert Read's claim that all real politics are local politics. But he knows that decisions made in city hall without a second thought can deeply affect the fine-grain texture of ordinary people's lives.

His other lesson, about proper and improper uses of a casting vote, is a little homily on statesmanship.

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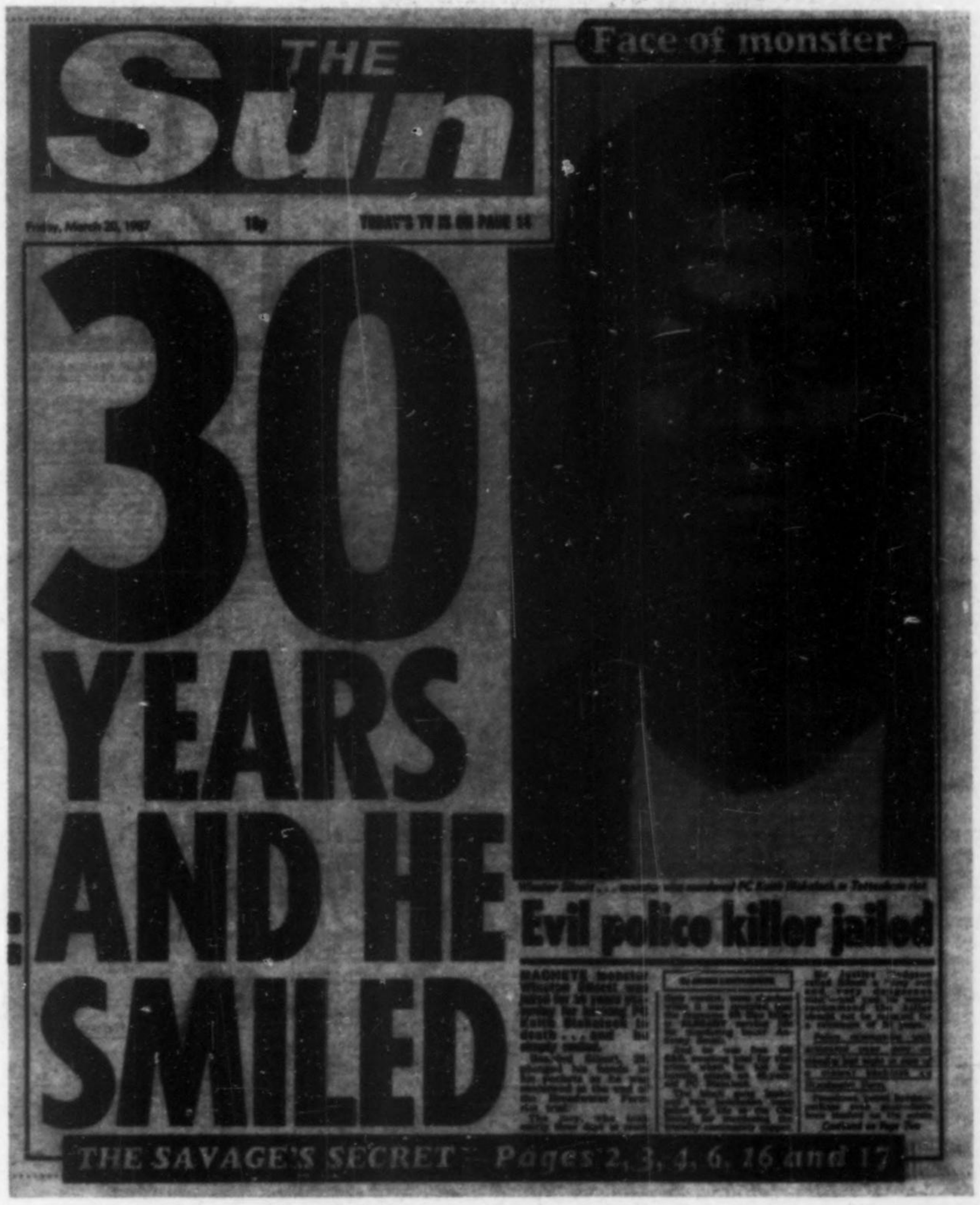
Mob law

Winston Silcott is reviled as the evil man who killed PC Blakelock. But did he? His trial was arbitrary and unjust, the evidence against him highly suspect. He believes he'll never get justice. Is he right?



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Government managers are hoping for support from the Labour Party to smooth the way for a swift passage of the legislation. There is little point in it unless it is in place before next May's local elections, the last for another four years.

SDLP leader John Hume said the legislation would play into the hands of Sinn Fein. "It is saying once again: 'The Brits don't like us. They don't want us to stand out for election and find out how many people support us.' It certainly will not help us. The issue in the election will not be the IRA but the declaration."
John Lewis

Railroaded

Ever since privatisers in and around the government started to turn their attention to British Rail, the response from BR has been to invoke the litany that "the customer must come first". Paul Channon, Secretary of State for Transport, has now taken the phrase for his own: BR will only be privatised *if* the government is convinced that this can provide a better service to travellers than has been supplied up to now. Since this government believes that in principle, anything produced by the free market is inherently better than that produced by the state, this will provide scant comfort for rail users.

But it is land development which most excites would-be investors in BR, not customer satisfaction. They have not failed to notice the immense profits which followed the sale of Royal Ordnance. Similar heavy profits from land development are forecast when the water industry is privatised. British Rail currently estimates that it owns 11,200 acres surplus to requirements, worth billions of pounds. Since 1980, nearly 10,000 acres have been sold off by BR and, in 1987/8, sales produced £181.4m with £82.4m coming in from letting.

The "enormous potential" of surplus BR land to potential investors is stressed by transport analysts in the City. And John Redwood, MP, formerly head of the prime minister's policy unit, holds out the carrot of land sales to encourage investment even in currently unprofitable provincial lines. *Vicky Hutchings*

DATAFILE

●**Preliminary results from the 1987 General Household Survey were issued last week by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.** Published in advance of the main report (the 1986 GHS has still not appeared), the results provide a picture of a Britain in which the standard family of a married couple with children continued to disappear while consumer durables and owner occupation increased, alongside one-parent families, part-time working for women, fewer people on employers' pension schemes and perceived ill-health.

In 1987:
*28 per cent of households consisted of a married couple and dependent children (31 per cent in 1979);
*25 per cent of households consisted of a lone person (17 per cent in 1971);
*13 per cent of families with dependent children were headed by a lone parent (8 per cent in 1971), 12 per cent being headed by a woman, 1 per cent by a man;
*63 per cent of householders were owner occupiers (49 per cent in 1971), 26 per cent rented from a local authority or new town corporation (34 per cent in 1981):
*29 per cent of males and 31 per cent of females reported suffering from a long-standing chronic illness (20 and 21 per cent respectively in 1979);
*46 per cent of households had videos (38 per cent in 1986) and 30 per cent had microwave ovens (23 per cent in 1986); 73 per cent had central heating (37 per cent in 1972).

●**The first ever publication of the *Directory of Charitable Organisations in Northern Ireland* appeared this month to fill a long awaited gap.** Charities in England and Wales currently have to register with the Charity Commission which maintains an index and public files on each one. Those in Scotland and Northern Ireland negotiate directly with the Inland Revenue whose records are not open to public inspection. The directory is published by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) in Belfast.

●**From 3 December, all interested anthropologists will be able to join a new organisation: the British Association for Anthropology in Policy and Practice.** BASAPP has been set up as an umbrella organisation which will maintain a single subscription list and produce a newsletter for the large number of small and financially fragile groups currently in existence. Organisations like the Group for Anthropology in Policy and Practice have affiliated to BASAPP and their activities, present and future, are reported. Details from Dr S Wright (convenor), tel 0273 606755 x 2440.

FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward reflects on local government and its liquidators

A leading article in the *Times* the other day remarked that: "The Italians have a charming, almost magical ability to survive without government." I thought that we would be urged to emulate this enviable achievement. But the very next sentence admonished those charming Italians: "But if Italy is to modernise more rapidly, it must sort out its governing machinery."

There is an instant riposte to this kindly-meant advice. Which national economy, that of Britain or Italy, has most successfully weathered the economic hurricanes of the years since the energy crisis of 1973? And to which aspects of Italian life do we attribute that country's ebullience?

Some people would talk knowingly about the flourishing informal or underground economy. Others would be determined to set aside that particular *frisson* of illegality and would stress the fact that while Britain has 2½m self-employed people, Italy with a similar total population, has 7½m and an incredible network of very small, but highly mechanised, workshops.

This is the result, whichever coalition might be ruling in Rome, of locally agreed politics, common to right and left, of positive support, cheap credit, advice and market intelligence, pooled accountancy and financial services, as well as ready availability of sites and premises. Local government, at city and regional level, is strong and active.

The chance circumstances of visiting both Germany and Italy this year led me to an unexpected conclusion. If you read the textbook history of Europe in the nineteenth century you will learn that the big events were the unification of Germany under Bismarck and Wilhelm I and the unification of Italy under Cavour, Garibaldi, Mazzini and Victor Emmanuel I. They seldom pause to make the obvious comment that these events were disasters for the people of Germany and Italy as well as for those of every other European nation.

But today if you ask yourself which are the most decentralised countries in Europe, you will be obliged to conclude that, apart from the ever-present example of Switzerland, they are the Federal Republic of Germany and the Italian Republic. And if you ask which is the most centralised state in Europe, you will have to say that it is the United Kingdom (with possible exceptions like Romania and Albania). For most of my life Britain has been moving steadily towards the demolition of local authorities and it is being accomplished by a government elected with slogans about setting the people free from the state.

It wasn't the current prime minister, but Clement Attlee, who set his government's policies firmly against local initiative and local control. Even in the 1930s he stressed the need to have central government officers "sent down into a locality to see that the will of central government is obeyed and its plans implemented."

His government removed local control of a dozen locally initiated services, like water, gas, electricity and hospitals. And it was precisely that centralism which has enabled our current rulers to do what they like with a whole range of public activities which here a century ago, or abroad today, it was taken for granted were a local matter.

The key is the power to gather revenue. When the poll tax comes, councils will no longer be able to set their own business rate. This will be pooled and redistributed in proportion to adult population. Brian Smith, county treasurer of Staffordshire, warns that "central government will regard the business rate as part of the overall exchange contribution to local government, and will as a consequence be tempted to regard itself as having direct control over about 75 per cent of local authority funding."

In all parties there is a minority of thoughtful people who pause and think about the range and scope of regionalism and localism. When the current fervour to concentrate all power at the centre has run its course they need to be ready with a programme of decentralisation of revenues and a restoration of the possibility for local initiative. Historically and philosophically this is not even a party matter. It would have seemed important for Burke, Gladstone, Disraeli and Keir Hardie. And it's something the Italians could tell us a lot about.

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The new jazz age

Young black musicians in Britain are reclaiming jazz for their generation. They play jazz that's savvy, sharp and serious, with roots in hard bop and hip hop, rap and reggae. Don't invoke the y-word. This music is strictly for the kids

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housing conditions through low rent council homes. No longer.

Until the bill is published it is not clear how the problem of debt charges will be dealt with. One of the main factors limiting private sector interest in council housing is the enormous debt charges outstanding on properties, particularly the more modern stock. Unless this issue is resolved the private sector is likely to keep its distance. If Nicholas Ridley decides to write off the debt charges it will amount to one of the biggest bonanzas for property speculators in the history of this government. *Nick Fielding*

The new refugees

It is more than two years since the Chernobyl disaster, and Soviet officials have now announced the demolition of the town which gave its name to the world. The hopes of over 10,000 people of one day returning to their homes have been dashed forever. This year, environmentalists started to discuss the impact made by modern 20th-century urban life on the world in terms of "a war against the environment". Wars usually produce refugees and this one is no different.

Accordingly the latest paper from the Worldwatch Institute, a non-profit research organisation based in the USA, is entitled: *Environmental Refugees—a yardstick of habitability*. "People fleeing from environmental degradation now make up the largest class of refugees in the world," writes the paper's author Jodi Jacobson, who estimates the true number of such people to be more than 10 million worldwide.

Degradation of farming land leading to desertification and drought is displacing by far the largest number, and making the effects of natural disasters even worse. The poisoning of land and water by toxic wastes is also adding to the ranks of refugees.

But, says Jacobson, "global warming leading to rising seas could become the greatest threat to habitability". A one metre rise in ocean levels worldwide could lead to a further 50 million refugees. Traditionally classified refugees now exceed 13 million and already countries in the west are attempting to restrict entry.

Tomorrow is a frightening prospect and the growing number of refugees, says Jacobson, is the best single measure of global environmental decline. *Vicky Hutchings*

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FRINGE BENEFITS

Colin Ward learns about everyday green values

It's over forty years since Orwell asked his rhetorical question "is it politically reprehensible, while we are all groaning under the shackles of the capitalist system, to point out that life is frequently worth living because of a blackbird's song, a yellow elm tree in October, or some other natural phenomenon which does not cost money and does not have what the editors of the left-wing newspaper call a class angle?" For he had endlessly met the statement that "a love of nature is a foible of urbanised people who have no idea what nature is really like."

Both attitudes survive. Jonathon Porritt reports that "greenery seems to have become irrevocably entangled in the barbed wire of class antagonism by being perceived as being overwhelmingly middle class." And when he interviewed Harold Evans for his book *The Coming of the Greens* (Fontana) Evans complained that Labour Party leaders had an arrogantly contemptuous notion that the working classes are not interested in the environment: "They have a vision of the working class as proles just waiting to be liberated. You see a similiar attitude in the new breed in the Tory Party, the ones with a microchip on their shoulder."

Jacquelin Burgess and Carolyn Harrison of the geography department at University College, London, confirm the survival of the disdain for the environmental values of "ordinary people" that Orwell noted so long ago. They went to a recent conference at the Royal Society on public perceptions of the countryside, and they report with dismay (in the November issue of the RTPI journal *The Planner*) that "Throughout the proceedings the general public was portrayed as insensitive, ignorant and passive; as people who do not share the same insights, knowledge or active concerns of the committed few."

Drs Harrison and Burgess were entitled to be dismissive, as for years they have been conducting an extended series of interviews and group discussions to discover the concepts, beliefs and values about the green environment among residents of different neighbourhoods in the London borough of Greenwich: from white working class groups in Thamesmead and Plumstead, to a group of Asian women in Woolwich and middle-class people in Eltham.

They found that all groups, regardless of social class, income or residence "gained great pleasure from the natural world", less in parks or playing fields than in daily life. The sensuous experience of encountering the natural world gave enormous pleasure in "walks along the riverside", round the houses and on the way to school; waste places seen from the top of a bus or used by children; streams and scrubby bits; farmland, woodland, golf courses, cemeteries and squares in shopping centres."

All these spaces, especially "the wild bits" and most especially among people living in estates without gardens, were highly valued because they provide places "where children can have adventures, experience independence for the first time, enjoy the companionship of other children, and discover the natural world."

This view of the social role of the urban green was given great stress by the Asian women, "separated from their childhood by geographical distance as well as age" and whose ordinary experiences of open spaces include racist abuse and physical harassment. Indeed since everyday fears, especially of more wooded and secluded places, include assault and violence, sexual dangers to women and children, vandalism, glue-sniffing and every kind of contemporary horror, Harrison and Burgess stress the need for more *social* management of these places which have such a *social* meaning.

Trying to find a concept that really reflected the aspirations of the groups whose green values they explored, which embraced the sensory experience of contact with nature, a wonderland of adventurous play, and a shared experience with children, families, neighbours and friends, the memorable phrase which occurred to them was outside the vocabulary of the parks department, the director of leisure services, and even, I fear, that of the conservation lobby. It was "gateways to a better world."